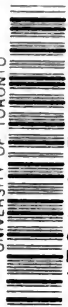


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POETS THE INTERPRETERS OF THEIR AGE.

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POETS THE INTERPRETERS OF THEIR AGE.

BY

ANNA SWANWICK,

TRANSLATOR OF "ÆSCHYLUS," "FAUST," ETC.

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TO

THE REV. JAMES MARTINEAU, LL.D., D.D., D.C.L.,

I dedicate the following work,

IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH

HE HAS GIVEN ME DURING ITS PREPARATION FOR

THE PRESS, AND IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE

UNBROKEN FRIENDSHIP WITH WHICH

HE HAS HONOURED ME FOR

A PERIOD OF FULL

SIXTY YEARS.

PREFACE.

THE following work had its origin in an address upon poets and poetry, which I gave to a private society, without any thought of publication.

Complying with the wish expressed by some of my hearers, that my address should be amplified and published, I now bring it, with great diffidence, before the public, in its expanded form.

To the learned I have nothing to offer, but am in hopes that to students my work, as presenting a brief historical survey of an important department of literature, may not prove altogether unacceptable.

With the bay-wreathed company of the world's great poets, I would fain have associated those of the United States of America, among whom there are several who are loved and appreciated on this side of the Atlantic, and who have been taken to the heart of England together with her native bards. In corroboration of this statement, I have only, among the departed, to recall the honoured names of William Cullen Bryant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Walt Whitman, and among the living, to name the two venerable patriarchs of song, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

These poets require, for their full appreciation, to be studied in connection with Transatlantic life, during the greater part of the century, when, for a considerable time, the burning evil of slavery formed a prolific source of inspiration to the American Muse; then came its deathblow, in the momentous struggle, rich in tragical and pathetic episodes, and in heroic deeds; these, with

various phases of speculative thought, together with aspirations, prompted by the enthusiasm of humanity, have impressed a distinctive character upon many utterances of American genius, entitling their authors to be regarded emphatically as the interpreters of their age.

From the above considerations, it will appear that to endeavour to compress within the narrow limits suited to my work the wide range of American poetry, would be a difficult and an ungracious task; I must therefore content myself with giving expression to my sense of its high and noble qualities, and to my grateful recognition of the delight and edification which I, together with multitudes on either side of the Atlantic, have thence derived.

It would also be beyond the scope of my work, to dwell upon the galaxy of living English poets, who, to the gratification of all lovers of the Muse, have exercised their high functions during the later decades of the century.

The only exception which I have made is Lord Tennyson, who, from his venerable age, belongs to the past as well as to the present, and without whose honoured name no historical survey of poetry would be complete.

Among the numerous writers to whom I am under obligation I desire to include Mrs. Oliphant, to whose "Makers of Venice" I am indebted for the extracts from Petrarch's Letters, quoted in my Essay on that poet.

REGENT'S PARK.

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POETS, THE INTERPRETERS OF THEIR AGE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE desire to penetrate to the origin of things would seem, from its universality, to be an instinctive feeling of the human mind. Hence the insatiable desire which prevailed, alike in ancient and in modern times, to penetrate the mystery which shrouded the fountains of the Nile.

Thus we would fain trace to its source the great river of humanity, which had its rise in "the dark backward and abysm of time."

Futile, however, is our wish! An impenetrable veil shrouds the origin of man, and conceals from our gaze the progenitors of the human race.

Science, it is true, promises to gratify our curiosity; she invites us to gaze upon the primordial germ from which, in accordance with her theory, have sprung the various tribes of living things, culminating with the appearance of man upon the globe. Should this theory prove correct, our sense of the mysterious grandeur of the universe, and of the preordaining wisdom of the all-pervading mind, would, in my judgment, be enhanced.

To this question, however, we need not at present address ourselves; history is concerned not with the origin, but with the progress of humanity—a process which, depending as it does upon man's observance of God's immutable laws, supreme in the domain of matter

and of mind, is necessarily arrested or retarded alike by his ignorance of those laws, and by his wilful violation of them; human progress, nevertheless, notwithstanding periods of apparent retrogression, continues, as our poet tells us, from age to age, its onward march:

“Since time means amelioration, tardily enough displayed,
Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly retrograde;”

a truth confirmed by the words of a still greater poet:

“There’s a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will;”

a Divinity whose controlling and superintending power is slowly, but surely, guiding humanity to its destined goal,

“To that far-off divine event,
Toward which the whole creation moves.”

Profound interest attaches to the study of history when viewed as the record of man’s progressive development; grand, however, as are her teachings, as she unrolls “the bloody chronicles of ages past,” I cannot but regard the teachings of poetry, in this particular, as grander still; during bygone ages the attitude of nation towards nation has been almost invariably one of hostility;—hence, in perusing the records of the past, we are introduced, for the most part, to national rivalries and antipathies, culminating too often in oppression and war. The darker aspects of national character, together with the utter disregard of morality displayed in international relations, being thus brought into prominent relief, it is not always easy, amid the tumult of conflicting interests, to trace the progress of humanity.

It has occurred to me that in wending our way through the tangled labyrinth of human affairs, we shall find a surer guide in Poetry, which, like a golden thread traversing the ages, bears witness to the continuity of culture, and binds together the present and the past.

Nor must it be forgotten that, when authentic history fails us, it is to poetry that we are indebted for revealing

to us the progenitors of our race, in far-off times, laying the foundations of our modern civilization. Hence the supreme interest which attaches to the poetic literature of the ancient Egyptians; also to the epic and lyrical poetry contained in the Sacred Books of Babylonia, and to the Vedic Hymns, the earliest record of Aryan thought which has come down to us.

Still deeper is the interest awakened by the Homeric poems, in which the prehistoric Hellenes are brought vividly before us; nor must it be forgotten that the key to the Homeric mythology is to be found in the poetry of Babylonian and of Vedic bards.

Inhaling the atmosphere of their age, while breathing forth, in strains of impassioned music, their inmost thoughts and feelings, the immortal poets of our race have unconsciously reflected in their works the tendencies, moral and intellectual, of the period in which their lot was cast; in their ideal world we see transfigured the actual world by which they were surrounded, and, while themselves the heirs of the ages which preceded them, they have in turn bequeathed new elements of progress to their successors.

Accordingly, it will be my object to consider the great masters of song not only in relation to their special function as "God's prophets of the beautiful," but also as revealing, from age to age, the successive stages reached by humanity on its onward march, together with its occasional periods of degradation and apparent retrogression.

Grand indeed has been the function of poetry, as one of the prime factors in promoting human progress, quickening the springs of faith and love, cherishing in the human soul the love of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True; uplifting it to higher and holier aspirations by the creation of ideals transcending our ordinary experience, and keeping alive the sacred fire of enthusiasm, without which the spirit is apt to droop under the deadening influence of custom and routine.

"Nor must it be forgotten that when, by the strong

sway of the imagination, we are transported by the poet 'mid Nature's old felicities,' we are not merely brought face to face with the mystic characters traced by the divine hand on the walls of this fair universe, we are also privileged to hear the voice of the Hierophant interpreting their hidden meaning, and translating the teachings of Nature into the low, sweet music of humanity."

"A great poem," it has been truly said, "is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight, and after one person and one age has exhausted its divine effluence, which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight."

It must be remembered, however, that poetry, like science, will yield up her treasures only to her faithful votary. Robertson has truly said that "the higher kinds of poetry demand study as severe as mathematics; the dew-drop that glitters on the end of every leaf after a shower is beautiful even to a child, but I suppose that to a Herschel, who knows that the lightning itself sleeps within it, and understands and feels all its mysterious connections with earth and sky and planets, it is suggestive of a feeling of far deeper beauty." The propriety of this illustration will be at once apparent when we contemplate poetry under its higher aspects, as the bright consummate flower of the age and country which gave it birth, drawing its nourishment from the deepest roots of the national life, and at the same time concealing beneath its delicate petals the germs of the future. Hence every great poem requires, for its full elucidation, to be studied, not only in connection with contemporaneous history, but also to be brought into comparison with the kindred productions of other ages and nations.

All hail, then, to the world's inspired singers, of every age and every clime, who, how remote so ever they may be from us and from each other, are nevertheless in a certain sense contemporaries of each succeeding age.

Bards who have ascended Parnassus,

“And stand with their head in the zenith, and roll their voice
from the summit,
Sounding for ever and ever thro’ earth and her listening nations,
And mixt with the great sphere-music of stars and of constel-
lations.”

To follow the river of song, as it glides through the ages, noting the several epochs in the world’s history, which we there find mirrored with magical beauty and unerring truth, is a great subject, of which I can only offer a very inadequate study.

At the present time, however, when the curriculum of female education is so largely extended, one cannot but feel apprehensive, lest the study of poetry, the chief intellectual pabulum of the elder generation, and a source of the purest and most elevated enjoyment, should, as it were, be crowded out.

Moreover, amid the multifarious interests of this busy age, political, economical, social, industrial, and scientific, the minds of men, whatsoever the sphere of their activity, are so intensely absorbed, that, without some counteracting agency, there is danger lest this habitual limitation of their intellectual horizon should tend to circumscribe their spiritual outlook, and to narrow the range of their sympathies. The best antidote to this tendency will, I believe, be found in poetry, which, dealing with universal and eternal truth, and giving harmonious expression to the varied emotions and experiences of our common humanity, appeals to the imagination and to the higher sentiments of the soul, thus calling into activity that side of human nature which, amid the absorbing interests of everyday life, is apt to lie fallow. Nor must it be forgotten that the cultivation of the imagination, by awakening the blessed power of sympathy, invests its possessor with that “beautiful and beauty-giving power” which glorifies the commonplace, and sheds a charm over the dullest walks of daily life.

So wide reaching, however, is the domain of poetry,

that those who are strangers there, and who have not much time at their disposal, like travellers in a foreign country, may be glad to avail themselves of a guide-book or a guide. To such, the following general survey of "Apollo's realm," indicating very briefly its most noteworthy provinces, together with their relative position in time and space, may not be altogether unacceptable.

I can only hope that my readers may be tempted to explore for themselves the various regions of enchantment to which I can only briefly call their attention, and which will open to them a boundless source of wonder and delight.

THE ARYAS.

THE affinity which exists between Sanskrit and various European languages, Celtic, Teutonic, Lithuanian, Hellenic, Latin, and others, would seem to indicate that, in bygone ages, the progenitors of the nations employing these languages must have dwelt together, in constant intercommunion, carrying with them, on their dispersion, the rudiments of the language common to all. It appears, however, from recent investigations into the dwellings and barrows of prehistoric tribes, that various European races, which have hitherto been regarded as belonging to the Aryan stock, though Aryan in speech, are non-Aryan in blood, a phenomenon which may be explained by the influence of climatic conditions, and by the process characterized as the "Aryanization of non-Aryan races," resulting from the incorporation of the latter by the primitive Aryas. Moreover, in accordance with these investigations the common home of the Aryas still remains shrouded in mystery.¹

For our purpose, however, it is unnecessary to inquire whether that home is to be sought in Europe or in Asia, nor need we dwell upon the question, deeply interesting to ethnologists, as to the origin of the various races, widely separated from each other in time and space, yet linguistically associated as members of the group of Aryan-speaking peoples.

Our concern being with literature, more especially with poetry, we turn with the deepest interest to the Vedic Hymns, the earliest literary expression of Aryan

¹ See "The Origin of the Aryans," by Isaac Taylor.

thought which has come down to us, and which, revealing the intimate connection existing between English and Sanskrit, form a wonderful bond of union and sympathy between England and her great dependency.

Deep interest, moreover, attaches to these Hymns when regarded as the sacred books of one of the most ancient religions of the world, and as illustrating the growth and development of the religious idea in some of its earliest stages.¹

The Beings to whom the Vedic Hymns were addressed are, as indicated by their names, impersonations of the great Nature-powers, which, by all primitive peoples, have been gazed upon with mingled feelings of wonder and admiration, of reverence and fear. Accordingly, the varied phenomena of Nature, Thunder, the Storm-wind, the all-embracing Ether, the Dawn, the Sun, the Heavenly Hosts, have justly been characterized as "the windows through which the ancient Aryas first looked into infinitude;" "behind the visible agencies of Nature they recognized a living presence,—something invisible and divine, and thus, through the contemplation of created things, they were led to some dim recognition of the Deity."

How slow and gradual was the process, we learn from Prof. Max Müller, who tells us that, in the Vedic Hymns, we can follow, step by step, the development which changes the sun from the mere luminary into a creator, preserver, ruler, and rewarder of the world—in fact, into a divine or supreme being. This process, he tells us, we can watch, again and again, with regard to most Vedic deities. "Thus to Agni, Varuna, Indra, and many others, whose names were at first employed to indicate mere natural phenomena, epithets are at length applied and whole descriptions given, which, to our minds, would be appropriate to a supreme deity only."

¹ For the following brief account of the Vedic Hymns, I am indebted to the Hibbert Lectures and other essays by Prof. Max Müller.

“It is a remarkable feature of the Vedic Hymns that, when the individual gods are invoked they are not conceived as limited by the power of others as superior or inferior in rank.” “We can hardly understand,” says Prof. Max Müller, “how a people who had formed so exalted a notion of the supreme God, and embodied it in the person of Indra, could, at the same time, invoke other gods with equal praise.”

Accordingly, the shadowy divinities of the Vedic Pantheon, the deified impersonations of physical phenomena, each supreme and absolute in turn, can hardly be recognized as distinct personalities, holding definite relations to each other or to their worshippers.

It is, however, deeply interesting to learn that, notwithstanding the indeterminate character of the objects of their worship, the Vedic bards, from the contemplation of a cosmic order, coincident, doubtless, with the progressive development of their own higher nature, rose at length to some dim recognition of their divinities, “as having established the eternal laws of right and wrong, as punishing sin and rewarding virtue, and, at the same time, as ready to forgive.”

The following extracts are from a hymn to Varuna :

“If I go along trembling, like a cloud driven by the wind ;

“Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.

“Through want of strength, thou strong and bright god, have I gone wrong ;

“Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.

“Whenever we men, O Varuna, commit an offence before the heavenly host, whenever we break the law through thoughtlessness ;

“Have mercy, Almighty, have mercy.”

The following hymn reminds us of the grand utterance of the Hebrew psalmist (Psalm cxxxix.) :

“The great lord of these worlds sees as if he were near. If a man thinks he is walking by stealth, the gods know it all.”

“If a man stands, or walks, or hides, if he goes to lie down, or to get up ; what two people sitting together whisper, King Varuna knows it, he is there the third.”

"He who should fly far beyond the sky, even he would not be rid of Varuna, the King."

We feel a closer bond of sympathy with our Aryan brethren on learning that they had been led to the recognition of God as the All-Father, or as the Heaven-Father. In many of the Vedic hymns he appears in this character: "O mighty Indra, be gracious to us! Be to us like a father!" "As a son lays hold of his father by his skirt, I lay hold of thee by this sweetest song."

Nor were the ideas of personal immortality and personal responsibility after death foreign to the Vedic bards; in many passages of the Vedas these truths are clearly proclaimed.

One poet prays that he may see again his father and mother after death; and the fathers are invoked almost like gods, oblations are offered to them, and they are believed to enjoy, in company with the gods, a life of never-ending felicity.

We find the following prayer addressed to Soma:—"Where there is eternal light, in the world where the sun is placed, in that immortal, imperishable world place me, O Soma!"

It is a deeply interesting fact that upon the minds of some Vedic bards had burst the grand idea that all the deities are but different names of one and the same godhead. This idea, we are told by Prof. Max Müller, while breaking forth here and there in the Vedas, is far from being general.

One poet, for instance, says: "They call Him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni; that which is One the wise call it in divers manners."

And again: "Wise poets make the beautiful-winged, though he is one, manifold by words." We are thus prepared to learn that finally the Vedic bards "threw away the old names, but they did not throw away their belief in that which they had tried to name. After destroying the altars of their old gods, they built out of the scattered bricks a new altar to the Unknown God—unknown, unnamed, and yet omnipresent; seen no more

in the mountains and rivers, in the sky and the sun, in the rain and the thunder, but present even then, and it may be, nearer to them and encircling them, no longer like Varuna, the encircling and all-embracing ether, but more closely, more intimately, being, as they called it themselves, the very ether in their heart; it may be the still small voice."

It is deeply interesting to find that the religion of the ancient Egyptians, in its course of development, offers a parallel to that of the Aryas. "They," the Egyptian people, we are told, "recognized as beyond, above, and comprehending all, one ineffable, eternal, omnipotent Being, whether adored under the names of Ammon, Plats, Osiris, Chepar, or any of the various emblematic embodiments that constitute the Egyptian Pantheon, each expressive of some one of the varied forms under which the phenomena of the material universe present themselves to human intelligence."¹

Deep interest moreover attaches to the unknown authors of the Vedic Hymns—men of wonderful genius, who, interpreting the phenomena of Nature by the religious instincts implanted in the human heart, attained to some dim apprehension of the most vital truths of religion. They were among the first who, "seeking after God, if haply they might find him," and embodying their aspirations in immortal song, inaugurated the long roll of poets who, from age to age during succeeding centuries, have carried on their heaven-appointed task. Surely these poet-seers of the prehistoric age justify the suggestion "that there may have been heathen poets, and sages, or sibyls again, in a certain extent divinely illuminated, and organs through whom religious and moral truth was conveyed to their countrymen, though their knowledge of the Power from whom the gifts came, and the perception of the gift as existing in themselves, may have been very faint and defective."²

¹ "Egyptiaca," Sir Charles Nicholson.

² "The Arians of the Fourth Century," Cardinal Newman.

It seems strange that, after advancing so far towards the realization of the divine presence in Nature and in the human soul, the religious progress of the Indian Aryas should have been arrested, and that its subsequent history should exhibit the melancholy spectacle of degeneracy and decay. This result may in some measure be attributed to the fact that the Vedic bards never entirely freed themselves from the nature-worship which formed the basis of their religious system, and which accordingly, on their recognition of the divine unity, may be characterized as a vague pantheism, fatal to the higher religious life alike of nations and of individuals.

In this pantheistic system the idea of personality is illusive; each individual, after a brief span of self-conscious existence, being supposed, like a drop in the ocean, to be reabsorbed into the divine essence, "lost in the fathomless abyss of being," a destiny constituting the Hindu ideal of blessedness. This system, notwithstanding the noble thoughts and aspirations embodied in many Vedic hymns by dissociating religion from life and from practical morality, has had a fatal effect upon the spiritual condition of the Hindus.

The subsequent development of Hindu religious thought was doubtless modified by the introduction into the Aryan system of lower elements derived from extraneous sources. To follow its history, however, till its embodiment in the system of Brahmanism, with its great Brahminical trinity (Vishnu, Brahma, and Siva), emerging from a background of pantheism, would be beyond the scope of this essay.

The religious system of the Iranian branch of the Aryas has, however, so largely influenced the poetry of Europe, that I must briefly call attention to its underlying principle.

The originator of this system, sternly opposed to the pantheism of the Aryas, was Zarathustra, popularly known as Zoroaster, the Iranian prophet, an historical personage, who came forward as a religious reformer, but to whom it is impossible to assign any date.

To him the idea of antagonism, involving the contest between good and evil, appeared to lie at the very root of the moral life; accordingly, instead of embracing the Hindu conception of the divine unity, he recoiled from it, and represented to himself the fundamental principle of the universe as a Duality, Ormuzd being the god of righteousness, and Ahriman his bitter antagonist. Each calls into existence spiritual beings, who are enlisted under their respective banners as the Prince of Light and the Prince of Darkness, their battle-field being this earthly sphere.

"Ahura and Mazda are titles given in the Veda to Varuna, but in the Avesta these two titles are combined as the proper name of the supreme God, and we have the magnificent conception of Ahuramazda (Ormuzd), the 'Lord Omniscient,' whose all-seeing eye is the glowing orb of day, whose son is the fire, while the robe which clothes him is represented as the vast starry firmament, which also is the garment of the Indian Varuna."¹

In the grand hymn with which, in the presence of the nobles of the land, Zoroaster is supposed to have inaugurated his religious reform, he exclaims :

"In the beginning there were two Spirits, each having his own distinct essence; these, the Good and the Base, rule over us in thought, word, and deed. Between these ye must, perforce, make your choice. Be good then, not base!

"Choose! An evil lot does he draw who chooses the wicked Liar! But he who chooses Ahuramazda, the All-holy and All-true, honours Him in faith by truthful word and holy deed.

"You cannot serve both.

"O Mazda! when our spirit is hard pressed in the fight, come thou to our aid."²

Many noble virtues were doubtless generated by the dualistic system of Iran, which required from its votaries a life of strenuous effort, together with the profoundest reverence for truth, its exaltation of which has been

¹ "The Origin of the Aryans," Isaac Taylor.

² Bunsen's "God in History," translated by Miss Winkworth.

characterized as the great inspiration of Mazdeism for the world; "for Ahuramazda is Light, and Light is Truth." Accordingly the hymns attributed to Zoroaster are, it has been truly said, "marked by a solemn earnestness, an awe-struck sense of the deep issues of right and wrong, which contrast with the delight in nature, the vivid imaginativeness, the playful fancy of the Vedic poems."

"There is a terrible consciousness of the conflict going on between Good and Evil, and of the power of both."¹ The following passages, with reference to purity, taken from the Zendavesta, are very striking. "Thus, O holy Zoroaster, does the law of the Lord take away all the evil thoughts, words, and deeds of a pure man, even as the strong swift wind clears the sky." "Purity is for man, next to life, the greatest good—that purity gained by the law of the Lord, to him who cleanseth his own self with good thoughts, words, and works." "But at the bottom of Zoroaster's religion was the poison-root of a Dual-Divinity;" and, as has been truly said, "anything approaching the idea of two gods in the universe leads immediately to gross superstition and wild mythology; the unity and grandeur of a pure religion are lost." Accordingly, "Mazdeism, as a power, died at length completely away, and only holds sway now over a few thousands of human beings."²

Some conceptions inherent in the religion of the Zendavesta entering into Judaism, through its contact with Persia at the time of the Captivity, and passing thence into some phases of Christianity, have deeply coloured the poetry of modern Europe, notably that of Dante and Milton, a subject which, at a subsequent period, will again come under our consideration.

¹ "The Sacred Poetry of Early Religions," Dean Church.

² "The Unknown God," C. L. Brace.

HELLAS.

HOMER.

THE affinity between the languages of the Indian and the Hellenic branches of the Aryas, together with the elements common to their respective mythologies, have led me to dwell at some length upon the Vedic Hymns, one of the earliest fountains of song accessible to us.

The sacred lays of which tradition tells, as sung to the Hellenes by legendary bards, may have been echoes of those to which their progenitors had listened before their departure from the common Aryan home.

Orpheus, the most illustrious of these ancient minstrels, the reputed author of the sacred or sacerdotal hymn, being the Hellenic form for the Indian Ribhu; "the Ribhus figuring in the Indian hymns as great artificers, the first men who were made immortal."¹

Various Epic poems, anterior to Homer, were known to the ancients, which, in addition to the existing Homeric poems, were, as early as the seventh century B.C., attributed to him. Of these all have perished, except the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," which are characterized by Mr. Grote as "those two unrivalled diamonds, whose brightness, dimming all the rest, has alone sufficed to confer imperishable glory even upon the earliest phase of Grecian life."

Into the so-called Homeric question as to the date and authorship of the Homeric poems, together with the various theories which have arisen both in Germany and

¹ Homer, R. C. Jebb.

England, as to their growth and development, I shall not enter. Irrespective of their origin, the deepest interest attaches to the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," as exhibiting the earliest European stage, accessible to us through literature, of Humanity's grand onward march, which, under the guidance of the poets, it is my purpose to follow through successive ages down to the present time.

Wonderful indeed, and deserving of careful study, is the spectacle presented to our imagination by the picture of the prehistoric Hellenes, as delineated in these ancient poems. If we glance first at the Homeric theology, we find the great Nature-powers, derived from various sources, the impersonations of which in the Vedic Mythology are scarcely recognizable as distinct personalities, metamorphosed into the Hierarchy of the Olympian Deities, every member of which is a living individuality, endowed with special characteristics.

Of these wonderful transformations a few examples must suffice. The undivided Aryas, we are told, had two names for the vault of heaven; Dyaus, the bright sky of day, which has been identified with the Homeric Zeus, the head of the Olympian Hierarchy; and Varuna, the overarching canopy of night, worshipped in the torrid East, among other impersonations of the great Nature-powers, as a supreme deity, and who re-appears in the Olympian system in the subordinate form of Uranus. The elemental character of Pallas Athene is universally recognized by scholars, among whom Profs. Max Müller and Welcker identify her respectively with the Dawn and the Ether, while by others she is regarded as the deified impersonation of the Lightning. The Hellenic Demeter has been identified with the Dyâvâ Mâter, the mother, corresponding to the Dyaus Pitar, the father, of Sanskrit mythology. Among the remaining deities of Olympus, also impersonations of the great Nature-powers, some, as we learn from the cuneiform tablets and from other sources, are of Syrian and Babylonian origin, and were introduced into Hellas, for

the most part, by the Phœnicians. Thus Apollo and Dionysus have been traced respectively to the Syrian and the Assyrian Sun-god. Istar, originally the Accadian impersonation of the evening star, after a variety of transformations, appears in the Homeric mythology under her twofold aspect as Artemis, "the arrow-pouring goddess," the ministress of death, and Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty and of love; "while Adar, originally a solar deity, regarded by the Assyrians as the warrior and champion of the gods, is connected with the Ares of Hellenic mythology."¹

Blending the Nature-worship of the Aryas with the religious conceptions of the various populations with whom the Hellenes had become associated, including ideas derived not only from Babylonian, Assyrian, and Phœnician, but also from Egyptian sources, the poet has combined these diversified elements into his grand Hierarchy of the Olympian divinities, wherein we see reflected the political system of the prehistoric age.

This transformation of physical into humanized deities, reflected in Hellenic mythology as the dethronement of the Titans, impersonating the elemental forces of Nature, to make way for the Olympians, has been compared by Welcker to the mysterious process by which the chrysalis passes into its more perfect form. "The Nature-god," he says, "became enveloped in a web of mythical fable, and emerged as a divine, humanized personality." "For the principle which lies at the root of this metamorphosis, he points to the gradual development of human nature, to the growing consciousness of freewill, accompanied by the recognition of mind as a higher manifestation of deity than any material phenomena, and consequently of man as the true Shekinah."²

Involved in this process was the investiture of these

¹ "The Hibbert Lectures." 1887. A. H. Sayce.

² I quote from the Introduction to my translation of the *Æschylean Trilogy*.

ideal personalities with the special attributes, qualities, and functions which harmonized with the Nature-power from which they had severally emerged, and of which they were the deified impersonations. Thus Apollo, "the far-darter," "the Sun in human limbs arrayed," was worshipped by the imaginative Hellenes, as "the god of life, of poetry, and light," the leader of the Muses, and the guardian of the sacred oracles.

Thus also Artemis—derived originally, as we have seen, from the Accadian Istar—the Moon-goddess, Apollo's sister, and like him an arrow-pouring deity, was arrayed by the Hellenes in an appropriate human form, armed with quiver and bow; while when regarded from a moral point of view, she became the special patroness of Chastity; how potent was the influence attributed to her under this character, appears from the drama of Euripides, where she is represented as the object of passionate devotion to Hippolytus.

Thus, as before observed, every Olympian divinity became the typical embodiment of some special function or attribute of humanity, in harmony with the Nature-powers whence they were derived, while, at the same time, as living personalities, they were endowed with special characteristics. This ascription of will, of distinct personality to the impersonations of the great Nature-powers—who, in the Vedas, while invested with certain moral attributes, being without definite individuality, vanished, lost in one all-embracing system of Pantheism—constitutes a further stage in the development of the religious idea. Nevertheless, this transformation of elemental into humanized divinities was accompanied by very serious drawbacks.

On the first transference of human passion and emotion, together with the conditions of human existence, to the super-mundane sphere, the very conception of divine existence, as absolved from restraint, would tend to the deification of human infirmity, together with the higher attributes of humanity. Of this we have a memorable example in the Homeric Zeus,

who, while exhibiting "the most complete surrender of personal morality and self-government to mere appetite," is also represented as the supreme governing power, the god of compassion, and the vindicator of righteous law.

Thus also Pallas Athene, the goddess of war, of industrial art, and of polity, the highest impersonation of intellect and energy, is represented by the poet as carrying out her schemes without the smallest regard to moral considerations; herself an adept in all guileful arts, she extols Odysseus, her prime favourite, as "crafty, knavish, subtle of wit, and of guile insatiate." (Od. xiii. 291.)

Upon the large subject of the Homeric mythology, to which I shall have occasion to return, I must not at present dwell at greater length. These wonderful creations to whom we are introduced for the first time in the Homeric poems, and in whom the divine idea is associated with the varied conditions of humanity, are invested with the deepest interest when considered in relation, not only to the religious life of the Hellenes, but also to the artistic culture of humanity. To Homer Pheidias was indebted for his grand conception of Olympian Zeus, "the Father of gods and men," "which he embodied in a statue of such nobleness and sweetness, such majesty and benignancy, that the Greeks felt its moral power as they did of no other work of Greek art." Other Hellenic sculptors would doubtless owe their inspiration to kindred sources, and it would, I believe, be impossible to exaggerate the importance of these sublime impersonations of the Homeric divinities in impressing upon the minds of the Hellenes their unwavering belief in the existence and personality of their deities, upon whose active agency in befriending their votaries they implicitly relied. Light is thus thrown upon the bitter hostility manifested by the Athenian multitude towards the philosophers and free-thinkers, who ventured to call in question the validity of the national religion.

From these highest achievements of Hellenic art, it is interesting to turn to its more archaic forms, and to

follow its progress during the earlier stages of development, a process facilitated by the results of recent Egyptian exploration.¹ Thus traces of two separate colonies of foreigners have been discovered, one dating from upwards of 2500 B.C., and the other from about 1600 B.C., yielding fragments of pottery of archaic Greek styles, inscribed with characters known as Cadmæan Greek. It is believed that numbers of similar sites, still unexcavated, await the explorer. These pre-historic settlements were succeeded, after the lapse of nearly a thousand years, by the Hellenic colony of Daphnae, founded 665 B.C., and subsequently by that of Naukrates, 556 B.C., where Egyptians and Hellenes associated on equal terms, and the sites of which have been recently discovered. Specimens of archaic sculpture and painting found in these localities bear witness to the profound influence exerted by Egyptian over Hellenic art.

Gradually, however, the artists of Hellas emancipated themselves from the conventional mannerisms of their Egyptian teachers, and going to nature for their models, and giving free play to the genius of their race, they eventually produced master-works which have never been surpassed.

The beginnings not only of Hellenic sculpture, but also of Hellenic architecture and decorative art, having been derived from Egyptian sources, the question arises whether the poets as well as the artists of Hellas, may not owe something to their Egyptian predecessors. Among the poetical productions of Egypt which have hitherto been deciphered, embracing an Epic, Hymns, and Love-songs, special interest attaches to the poem composed in honour of Thothmes III., the great Egyptian Conqueror, about 1600 B.C., engraved on a stila of black granite, found in the Temple of Karnak. "This beautiful and poetic hymn," it has been truly

¹ See "Pharaohs, Fellahs, and Explorers," by Amelia B. Edwards.

said, "is full of inspiration, and though many centuries older than Homer and the Bible, is one of the most valuable specimens extant of ancient literature."¹

The god, Amen-Ra, is supposed to address the King, who is represented before him in an attitude of adoration; after a few lines of prose, "the god breaks suddenly into rhythmic verse." From the ten stanzas composing the hymn, each recording a royal conquest, I select the following:²

1 "I came! I gave thee might to fell the princes of Taha. I cast them beneath thy feet, marching across their territories. I made them to behold thy Majesty as a Lord of Light, shining in their faces, even in my own likeness!"

3. "I came! I gave thee might to fell the people of the far East! Thou hast traversed the provinces of the land of the gods. I made them to behold thee, like unto the star of morning, shedding radiance and showering dew!"

4. "I came! I gave thee might to fell the nations of the West! Phœnicia and Cyprus have thee in terror. I made them to behold thy Majesty even as a young Bull, bold of heart, horned, and unconquerable!"

7. "I gave thee might to fell the people of Libya! The Isles of the Danæans are under the power of thy will. I made them to behold thy Majesty as a furious Lion, crouching over their corpses, and stalking through their valleys."

It is interesting to find "the name of Danæans applied, at this early age, in the Homeric sense, to the whole Hellenic race."

"The poem concludes with a few lines of peroration in measured prose."

Another striking Egyptian poem is the grand historical "Epic of Pantaur," written to commemorate the personal courage of Rameses II., about 1400 B.C., and which has been styled the Iliad of Egyptian literature. In this poem mention is made of five Hellenic nations,

¹ "Outlines of Ancient Egyptian History," by Auguste Mariette Bey.

² I avail myself of the translation of this hymn given in the work above alluded to, "Pharaohs, Fellahs, and Explorers," by Amelia B. Edwards.

the Mysians, the Lycians, the Carians, the Ionians, and the Dardanians; while early in the reign of Menepthah, son of Rameses II., the supposed Pharaoh of the Exodus, an inscription at Karnak, among a barbarian host invading Egypt from the westward, introduces the Achæans; "this event," we are told, "marks the earliest entry of the Achæans upon the world's great stage." They were clad in brass like the heroes of Homer, with cuirasses and greaves.

Considering the intimate relation subsisting between Hellas and Egypt in prehistoric as well as in historic times, and the consequent familiarity of the Hellenes with Egyptian poetry, of which "The Chant of Thothmes III." and "The Epic of Pantaur" are specimens, it seems not unreasonable to believe that their debt to the land of the Pharaohs must have been as great from the literary as from the æsthetic point of view. This opinion is confirmed when we remember that the Sirens, the Harpies, and the Sphinx, which play so conspicuous a part in the poetry of Hellas, are, in outward form at least, of Egyptian origin. It is interesting in this connection to consider the shield of Achilles, as described by Homer (*Il.* xviii. 490-607), upon which light has been thrown by Schliemann's Mycenæan excavations. The pictures formed by various inlaid metals, on the dagger-blades found in the Mycenæan graves, the effect of which is heightened by the use of colour, reveal the process, hitherto a mystery, by which the various metals and colours mentioned by Homer might have been employed in fashioning the groups upon the Homeric shield.¹

In addition to their artistic value, these groups are noteworthy, not only as exhibiting under certain aspects the manners and customs of the prehistoric Hellenes, but also as illustrating the striking contrast which exists between the Hellenic genius, especially when manifesting

¹ See "Schliemann's Excavations," by Dr. C. Schuchhardt, translated by Eugène Sellers.

itself in the sphere of art, and that of Egypt and Assyria.

While symbolism, allowing free play to the vagaries of the fancy and of the imagination, may be regarded as the underlying principle of oriental art,¹ that of Hellenic art may perhaps be not inaptly characterized as the idealization of the real, founded upon the recognition of the affinity subsisting between the True and the Beautiful; hence the absence of exaggeration, together with the perfection of form, which distinguishes all the later productions of the Hellenic genius. Hence also the immense benefit conferred upon humanity by the sculptors of Hellas, who, while embodying in marble the creations of Homer and other Hellenic bards, have bequeathed to the world models of grandeur and of loveliness, which, though surviving frequently only in a mutilated condition, have tended, from age to age, to keep up a high and noble ideal of the human form.

Deep interest attaches not only to the religion and art of the prehistoric Hellenes, but also to their political system as brought vividly before us in the Homeric poems. That system, it must be remembered, not only offered a striking contrast to the despotism which overshadowed the great monarchies of the prehistoric age, it also contained, in its integral elements, the germs of all the subsequent polities of Hellas, and exhibited the fundamental basis of those political institutions which conferred upon a comparatively insignificant region its widely extended influence and enduring fame.

The Egyptians, as is well known from various sources, and also the Phœnicians, not only traded with the early settlers in Hellas, they also established sovereignties there; a theory supported by the legends concerning Minos, Cadmus and Danaus. These foreign rulers would, in process of time, be supplanted by native chiefs, who, inheriting the wealth and power of their Egyptian or Semitic forerunners, would establish those monarchical

¹ See "Some Aspects of Greek Thought," S. H. Butcher, M.A.

dynasties which, in the Homeric poems, are represented as existing among the prehistoric Hellenes, and the origin of which, without foreign agency, it would be difficult to understand.¹

Whatever the source whence the monarchical principle was introduced into Hellas, we find it, as depicted by Homer, profoundly modified by the Hellenic genius. The king, indeed, whose office was hereditary, and who ruled by divine right, formed the centre of the national life; to him were assigned the command of the army and the administration of justice, together with the function of public sacrificer. Unlike the Oriental despot, the supreme and absolute monarch—the king, as represented in the “*Iliad*,” was surrounded by a body of chieftains, also styled kings, forming the *Boulé* or Council, which assembled from time to time under his presidency for consultation and to arrange measures for the popular assembly.

Numerous passages might be quoted from the “*Iliad*” to illustrate the deference paid by his royal companions to Agamemnon, the supreme sceptre-holding king (i. 279, ii. 204-206); nevertheless, when he was in the wrong, they did not hesitate to remonstrate with and even to rebuke him (ix. 96-113, xix. 182); and his projects, so far from being invariably sanctioned, were occasionally overruled (ix. 32-50).

When questions of public interest were to be decided, an assembly of the people, styled from their place of meeting, the *Agora*, was convoked to hear the resolutions adopted by the king and council. These assemblies were addressed by the members of the council, and though no division was taken, the speeches made on these occasions, and which often took the form of elaborate orations, indicate the importance which was attached to securing through persuasion the sympathy and concurrence of the multitude; they indicate also the capacity for comprehending and for appreciating such

¹ See “*Social Life in Greece*,” Rev. J. P. Mahaffy.

orations on the part of those to whom they were addressed.

Already, in the prehistoric age, "the public voice is a power which the king may not with impunity despise." This striking feature of the Homeric age, the power namely of public speech, the Palladium of free institutions, continued to characterize the politics of Hellas down to the latest period of her history.¹ The grand speeches delivered by the Homeric chieftains may be regarded as preluding the splendid orations of Pericles and Demosthenes, when oratory had become an all-important factor in the direction of public affairs. We are reminded in this connection, of the description given in the "*Iliad*," by Antenor, of the eloquence of Odysseus, the prime orator of the prehistoric age (*Il.* iii. 221-224).

The episode of Thersites (*Il.* ii. 212-277), who ventured to denounce the conduct of Agamemnon, has been cited as affording "a proof that the feeling of personal dignity of which philosophical observers in Greece—Herodotus, Xenophon, Hippokrates, and Aristotle—boasted as distinguishing the free Greek citizen from the slavish Asiatic, was yet undeveloped in the time of Homer." It would, however, in my opinion, be doing injustice to the Hellenic bard to regard Thersites as the representative of the Demos, or to interpret the indignities inflicted upon him by Odysseus with the approval of the multitude, as indicating the passive or servile character of the Agora in the prehistoric age. We have already seen the solicitude of the chiefs to secure through their addresses the sympathy of the crowd; and when, on the occasion of the embassy from Troy, the people loudly applaud the advice of Diomedes, Agamemnon, turning to the Trojan herald, exclaims, "Idaios, e'en thyself hast heard the voice of my Achaians," a striking proof of the importance attached to the popular voice (*Il.* vii. 403-406).

The incident, which illustrates indeed the subordinate,

¹ See "*Homeric Studies*," by the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone.

though not necessarily the servile, position of the Agora, takes place, it must be remembered, at a momentous crisis when the safety of the army was at stake.

In passing from this slight sketch of the religious and political systems of the prehistoric Hellenes to a brief consideration of their conceptions and practices in the sphere of morals, a distinction must be observed between the morality of Homer and the morality of the Homeric age, a distinction to which attention will be called as we proceed.

As a striking feature of the Homeric Epics, we may notice in the first place their recognition of the great principle of retributive justice, which visits with punishment the wrong-doing alike of states and individuals.¹

Accordingly, not only is the principle of retribution embodied in the fundamental conception alike of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," it finds illustration also in their subordinate details. Notwithstanding this recognition in the Homeric poems of a moral law lying at the root of human existence, investing it with spiritual significance, it would appear from the state of society therein depicted that the ethical standard of the prehistoric Hellenes, coloured doubtless by the immoral elements in their national religion, was decidedly low as compared with their general progress in civilization.

In illustration of this remark I may appeal to the slight value which they appear to have attached to human life as evinced by the common practice of homicide, of which numerous instances are mentioned by Homer, together with the immunity attending its commission, even under circumstances the most revolting.

Piracy, as well as homicide, being regarded in the heroic age as perfectly legitimate, was practised by the Homeric heroes without the slightest compunction. Thus Nestor, after courteously entertaining Telemachus

¹ This principle, under another aspect, finds expression in the Homeric account of Erebus, the abode of the departed, which will be considered in another connection.

and Mentor, thus addresses them: "Strangers, who are ye? Whence sail ye over the wet ways? On some trading enterprise, or at adventure do ye rove, even as sea-robbers over the brine, for they wander at hazard of their lives, bringing bale to alien men?" Thus also Odysseus, as a means of replacing the property destroyed by the sailors, declares his intention of having recourse to freebooting. "Take thou no thought for the care of my wealth in the halls," he says to Penelope; "but as for the sheep that the proud wooers have slain, I myself will lift many more as spoil."¹

Another repulsive feature of society in the Homeric age was its treatment of unprotected women and children, together with its want of consideration for old age. The aged, having become useless, were, except under special circumstances, treated with contumely and neglect. In the case of unprotected women the theory that "Might is Right" was carried out in its most revolting form. On the capture of a city the women, married and unmarried, became the spoil of the victors, a feature of the prehistoric age faithfully reflected in the "Iliad." Thus on occasion of the embassy to Achilles, among the inducements to lay aside his anger offered to him in the name of Agamemnon, Odysseus, anticipating the ultimate fall of Troy, after promising that he shall lade his galley with booty, adds:

"And do thou take thyself the choice of twenty Trojan women, who after Argive Helen seem preeminent of beauty." And Achilles, lamenting the death of Patroclus, declares that Trojan and Dardan dames, whom they have won with their spears, shall wail night and day round the corpse of his friend.

The profound pity felt by the poet for these unhappy captives finds pathetic expression in a single line, telling how their wail for Patroclus only gave them the pretext for lamenting their own sad doom (Il. xix. 302).

¹ The "Odyssey," translated by S. H. Butcher, M.A., and A. Lang, M.A.

Thus also Andromache's lament over Hector, in which she describes the melancholy fate awaiting the orphan, deprived of his father's protection,—while revealing the pitiless cruelty of a semi-barbarous age, reveals also the tender-heartedness of the poet, who awakens in the mind of the reader the profoundest pity both for the widowed mother and the fatherless Astyanax, which doubtless prompted his soul-harrowing picture (Il. xxii. 484-507).

The curious allusions to cannibalism in the "Iliad" (iv. 35, xxii. 345, xxiv. 212) also indicate, as pointed out by Mr. Gladstone, "that the civilization of the pre-historic Hellenes, though its path was marked and decided, had not had time to travel far from barbarism."¹ The same inference might be drawn from the brutal ferocity exhibited occasionally by the two great protagonists of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey."

The savagery displayed by Achilles in the slaughter with his own hand of twelve Trojan captives, four horses and two dogs, at the funeral of Patroclus, together with his outrage upon the body of Hector, is indeed condemned by the poet, who doubtless gives expression to his own sentiments regarding the character and conduct of his hero through the lips of Apollo, by whom, in the assembly of the gods, he is characterized as "Deadly Achilles,"

"Who neither rightful is in mind, nor may his breast be melted,
But brutal as a lion is, which, urg'd by haughty spirit,
Sallies with mighty force, the flocks to clutch, and glut his
hunger."² (Il. xxiv. 40-42.)

The brutality characteristic of a semi-barbarous age, appears also in the remorseless severity displayed by Odysseus in the indiscriminate slaughter of the suitors

¹ From the remains found in distant parts of Europe of the Iberian race, the supposed occupiers of Hellas prior to the arrival of the Aryas, it appears that they were addicted to cannibalism. See "The Origin of the Aryans," by Isaac Taylor.

² F. W. Newman's translation.

and their wretched paramours, while the interference of Pallas Athene, with the thunder-bolt of Zeus, was required in order to arrest his bloodthirsty onslaught upon his rebellious subjects.

As a final indication of the barbarity which characterized the so-called heroic age, I will call attention to King Achetus, "the general mutilator of mankind," to whom the suitors threaten to send Irus, should he be worsted in his fight with Odysseus, and who, they tell him, will cut off his nose and his ears with the pitiless steel, and perpetrate upon his person other frightful atrocities, a threat which is more than once repeated.

Happily the heroic age, as depicted in the Homeric poems, is not without its redeeming features, among which one of the most striking is the strength and tenderness of the domestic affections, as exhibited in the conjugal, the parental, and the filial relations.

Wonderfully pathetic are the words addressed by Andromache to Hector ere he parts from her at the Skæan Gates. After describing the death of her royal sire, of her seven brothers, and of her mother, she continues thus :

"But Hector, thou my father art, and thou my queenly mother,
Thou art to me for mother's son, and thou my blooming consort."
(Il. vi. 429-430.)

It would be difficult to parallel in literature the description of Penelope's rapturous joy at the return of Odysseus, which is aptly compared to that of the shipwrecked mariner all crusted with brine, who beyond hope sets foot on land, having escaped the peril of the deep. "So welcome to her was the sight of her lord, and her white arms would never quite leave hold of his neck."¹ (Od. xxiii. 239-240.)

As illustrating the strength of the filial sentiment, I may appeal to the anxiety felt by the Shade of Achilles

¹ I quote from Butcher and Lang's translation of the "Odyssey."

in the nether world, lest Peleus, his noble sire, should, in his old age, having no son to protect him, suffer dishonour from the Myrmidons. "Ah!" he exclaims, "could I but come for an hour to my father's house, as then I was, so would I make my might and hands invincible, to be baleful to many an one of those who do him despite and keep him from his honour." (Od. xi. 500-502.)

Equally striking is the survival in the phantom of Achilles of the paternal sentiment in all its strength. His heart exults with pride and joy as he listens to the story of his son's exploits as related by Odysseus, who thus concludes: "So I spake, and the spirit of the son of Æacus, fleet of foot, passed with great strides along the mead of Asphodel, rejoicing in that I had told him of his son's renown." (Od. xi. 537-539.)

Very touching also is the reply of Anticleia, the mother of Odysseus, to his inquiry as to the cause of her death. "It was not the archer goddess of the keen sight who slew me in my halls, nor did any sickness come upon me; nay, it was my sore longing for thee and for thy counsels, great Odysseus, and for thy loving kindness that reft me of life." (Od. xi. 97-202.)

Another redeeming feature of the heroic age is the high position assigned to Queen Helen at the court of Menelaus (Od. iv. 120, *sqq.*) and to Queen Arete, a truly beautiful character, at the court of Alcinous (Od. vii. 66, *sqq.*). This aspect of royalty offers another striking contrast to the Oriental despotism which cast its baleful shadow over the great Assyrian monarchy; there, while the power of the king was absolute, his queens, each of whom was secluded in her separate state apartments, remained almost invisible during their whole lives, and were, in fact, slaves to their regal dignity.¹ The freedom accorded to women, in the heroic age, of which the Princess Nausicaa offers a charming example, was not,

¹ "Life in Ancient Egypt and Assyria," from the French of G. Maspéro.

as pointed out by Mr. Mahaffy, the exclusive privilege of the higher classes.

Very beautiful was the bond of friendship between Achilles and Patroclus, the strength of which appears from the agony of grief which overwhelms Achilles on learning the death of his friend. (Il. xviii. 22-27.)

Beautiful also was the reception accorded by Achilles to Priam when the aged monarch came to ransom the body of Hector. (Il. xxiv. 507, *sqq.*)

Before concluding this inadequate survey, from a moral point of view, of the prehistoric age, as reflected in the Homeric poems, reference should be made, not only to these indications of nobler feeling on the part of Achilles, but also to the courtesy and consideration shown to each other by the Homeric chieftains, together with the sacredness attached to the observance of hospitality, the suppliant and the guest being considered as under the special guardianship of Zeus.

Never did the utterance of the poet, proclaiming that "the Beings of the mind are essentially immortal," find more striking illustration than in the heroes and heroines of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," who, like the characters of Shakespeare, representing the fundamental principles, together with the primary passions, affections, and emotions of human nature, drawn, moreover, not merely in broad outline, but with the most minute individualization, are universally interesting and intelligible. Achilles and Odysseus, with the other leaders of the Hellenic host, Priam and Hector, Andromache and Helen, Penelope and Nausicaa—all, after the lapse of nearly three thousand years, are as living as when they first issued from the poet's brain.

Upon the tempting theme of Homeric characterization, and upon the wonderful variety and beauty of the Homeric similes and descriptions of natural scenery, I must not, however, dwell.

Having endeavoured to indicate, very imperfectly, in the sphere of religion, of politics, and of morals the level reached by the Hellenes in the prehistoric age, I must

reluctantly leave unnoticed many other interesting aspects of the Homeric poems.

Vast indeed has been the influence exercised by Homer as "the Educator of Hellas." From the middle of the fifth century B.C., when editions of the poems appear to have been multiplied, he became, as stated by the historian, "the centre of national feeling, and as a token of mutual recognition as against barbarians." "Hence the national Epos, borne across the sea to the colonies, and guarded as a communal treasure in the cities, became the prime instrument for developing the national unity." "On the Black Sea, as well as in Gaul and Spain, the Greeks," we are told, "preserved their nationality by causing their children to grow up at school with Homer."

Among the allusions to the Homeric poems found in Classical Authors, one of the most noteworthy is the tribute paid to Homer by Aristophanes in his imaginary dialogue between Æschylus and Euripides, held in Hades in the presence of Dionysus, the judge of the combat, as to their respective claims to occupy the tragic throne.

Æschylus declared that the men whom he had created had been noble and brave, breathing war and sevenfold courage. Dionysus inquires how he has taught his countrymen to be so courageous. Æschylus replies, by composing a drama full of martial spirit, "The Seven Against Thebes," and then by giving them "The Persians," which taught them to desire to conquer their adversaries. "Such," he adds, "are the subjects which poets ought to treat."

"Behold, how useful from of old has been the race of singers. Orpheus taught us the sacred mysteries and avoidance of murder; Musæus, the cure of diseases and the oracles; Hesiod, the labours of the earth, the times of harvest and ploughing; and the Divine Homer, whence did he obtain honour and glory, if not that he taught the marshalling of armies, noble deeds, and the equipment of heroes? It is after him that I have

fashioned the many virtues of Patroclos and lion-hearted Tydeus, thus to awaken in every citizen the desire to equal these heroes when he should hear the trumpet of war."

Before passing on to consider the dramatic literature of Hellas, it may be remarked that the Homeric poems are pervaded by the dramatic element. In illustration of this remark, I may appeal to the debate in the tent of Achilles, on occasion of Agamemnon's deputation, when the harangues of the deputies and the address of Achilles, especially the latter, are eminently characteristic of the speakers.

When different parts came to be assigned to the Rhapsodists, who recited alternately, doubtless with appropriate gesture, the performance would bear a close resemblance to a theatrical dialogue. Hence, as suggested by Mr. Gladstone, Homer would appear to stand in closer relation to the theatre of his country than is generally supposed.

When we consider the permanent and world-wide influence exercised by the first great Hellenic bard, we can hardly be surprised to hear of the temple erected in his honour by an Egyptian king, one of the successors of Alexander, where he appeared seated upon a golden throne, surrounded by statues of the cities which disputed the honour of his birth, while all the poets were represented as drawing inspiration from a fountain issuing from his mouth.

HELLAS.

Æschylus, B.C. 525—456.
Sophocles, B.C. 495—406.
Euripides, B.C. 480—407.

Aristophanes, B.C. 448.
Plato, B.C. 428—347.

THE Hellenic drama, as is well known, sprang from the dithyramb, or choral song, sung at the festivals of Dionysus, in honour of the god; Dionysus himself being sometimes impersonated by the leader, and the satyrs, his companions, by the chorus; these choral songs were occasionally interrupted by narrative recitations, while the songs assumed the form of dialogues between the leader and the chorus; the performance being enlivened by action and appropriate costume.

As the bestower of the vine, and the inspirer of hilarity, Dionysus would be celebrated in songs of gladness and mirth, while the various emotions awakened by the recital of his adventures, crowned, as they were, by his descent into Hades, and his translation, with his mother, Semele, to Olympos, would find expression in more solemn strains. Thus, from its birth, the drama, under its twofold aspect of tragedy and comedy, was invested with a sacred character, its performance being regarded as a religious rite.

The first step in the development of the dithyramb into the drama was taken when, for the fortunes of Dionysus, to which it had been originally confined, the exploits of other national heroes were substituted. This process was accelerated by the introduction into Athens, by Pisistratus, of the spring and winter festivals cele-

brated at Icaria, and other localities in Attica, in honour of Dionysus.

Accordingly, eight years before the death of Pisis-tratus, Thespis, having been summoned from Icaria, brought out his first play at the winter or Lenaen festival at Athens, in 535 B.C.

Various innovations, in connection with these dithyrambic performances, are said to have been introduced by Thespis, one of the most noteworthy being the introduction of an actor, who, by employing different masks, was enabled to represent various personages in the same play, and who, in place of the chorus, carried on the dialogue with the leader, while, at the same time, "a system of order was introduced into the alternation of recitative and song."

Down, however, to the Persian invasion, the choral song continued to form the prevailing element in the Dionysiac festivals.

The genius of Hellas, uplifted to a supreme height by her deliverance from the impending yoke of her barbaric foe, among other vehicles of expression, embodied itself in the national drama, of which Æschylus, by the introduction of a second actor, and the subordination of the choral song to the dialogue, may justly be regarded as the founder.

Patriot, prophet, and poet, Æschylus has been justly styled the Pheidias of tragic art, and in the magnificent statues of Zeus at Olympia, and of Pallas Athene at the Parthenon, the Athenians would doubtless recognize the majestic deities who played so conspicuous a part in the dramas of their mighty bard.

The sculptors of Hellas, embodying in human personalities, the fundamental ideas underlying the Hellenic divinities, impersonations, for the most part, of natural phenomena, and appealing to eye and soul through the medium only of external form, have given birth to models of ideal beauty which have never been surpassed, and which, being based upon principles fundamentally true, can never become obsolete.

It is otherwise with poetry, which, through the vehicle of language, gives direct expression to the ideas, not only of the poet himself, but also of his contemporaries. Hence, in considering the dramatic poetry of Hellas, as illustrating the progress of humanity, it must be studied, not from the literary and artistic standpoint, but as a mirror, reflecting the convictions, in religion, in politics, and in morality, of the age which gave them birth.

Bearing this in mind, I shall dwell upon a few characteristic features of Hellenic sentiment and thought, as manifested in the works of the three great Attic tragedians: Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and also of Aristophanes.

"God's prophets of the Beautiful these poets were," exhibiting in their dramatic creations, that fine sense of proportion, that absence of exaggeration, together with other elements of beauty, which may be regarded as the leading characteristics of Hellenic art.

Æschylus is said to have characterized his dramas as "fragments from the great Homeric banquet;" yet nothing can be more striking than the contrast between the repulsive, sensual, cloud-compelling Zeus of the "Iliad," "thrice outwitted by Hera," and the grand Being represented in the "Agamemnon," not only as exercising supreme authority in the moral government of mankind,

"In will, in deed,
Sole cause, sole fashioner," (Ag. 1462.)

but also as acting inwardly on the souls of men; it is Zeus "whose highest gift is an untainted mind" (Ag. 900), and who leads men to wisdom through suffering. (Ag. 169.)

In the "Suppliants," he is invoked as "King of kings, most blessed of the blest; among the Perfect, Power most perfect, Zeus, supreme in bliss." (Sup. 518.) He is characterized as the jealous watcher, enthroned on high, whose wrath abides implacable if the just claim of the suppliant is denied. (Sup. 374.) Zeus, Protector of the guest, the Highest, who directs Destiny by hoary

law. (Sup. 655.) He is likewise apostrophized as the great Artificer, Supreme Ruler, whose deed is prompt as his word to execute the designs of his deep-counselling mind. (Sup. 587.)

The high character thus ascribed to the Æschylean Zeus, may perhaps be regarded as irreconcilable with the revolting aspect under which the supreme deity of Hellas is represented in "The Prometheus Bound," where he is portrayed as the cruel and obdurate despot. The apparent contradiction has doubtless arisen from the loss of the concluding drama of the Promethean trilogy. Æschylus having undertaken, as his peculiar function, to reconcile the conflicting agencies in human life and in the Olympian Hierarchy, sets forth in the Promethean trilogy the struggle between the finite and the infinite will, one aspect of the combat between the Titans and the Olympian gods.

"The Prometheus Bound" exhibiting the antagonism between the conflicting powers, ends with the overthrow of the rebellious Titans.

"The Prometheus Released," which exhibited their reconciliation, is unfortunately lost; the denouement of the lost drama can, however, be satisfactorily recovered from the fragments which remain. The colossal Titans, representing the elementary forces of nature, personified as gods, delivered from their mighty toils, reappear as beneficent but subordinate agents, assisting, as the chorus of the new drama, at the deliverance of Prometheus.

Prometheus, the arch-rebel, who hurled defiance against the Thunderer, taught wisdom by suffering, is transformed into his willing subject and minister, while Zeus, his majesty fully vindicated, and firmly seated on his holy throne, appears as the one supreme deity, whose will is law.¹

The most remarkable feature of the Homeric Apollo is the complete harmony of his will with that of Zeus,

¹ Having in the introduction to my translation of "The Prometheus Bound," endeavoured to set forth its underlying ideas, I shall not here dwell upon the subject at greater length.

together with their common advocacy of the Trojan cause; he is, moreover, represented in the "Iliad" as the object of widespread worship, prayer, which he hears and answers, being offered to him without limitation to any particular locality. Thus he is invoked by Glaucus. (Il. xvi. 514-516.)

"Hear me, O Lord, who haply art in Lycia's rich land, or in Troas; for everywhere thou art able to listen when man is in trouble, as trouble now weighs upon me."

He is also endowed with foreknowledge, and by the flight of birds, and other omens, gives indication to mortals of coming events. Notwithstanding these, and other high functions attributed to him in the Homeric Epics, he exhibits, on more than one occasion, the low moral tone which, as there depicted, characterizes the deities of Hellas. I refer more especially to the part played by him in the lay of Demodocus (Od. viii. 335-337), and also to his dastardly conduct towards Patroclus. (Il. xvi. 788-805.)

The destruction of Ilium being, moreover, foreordained, the aid imparted by Apollo to the Trojans and their allies, is not unfrequently delusive. (Il. x. 575, xx. 213.)

The higher character attributed by Æschylus to Zeus is shared by Apollo, to whom the poet especially accords the epithet (*ἄγνός*) pure (Sup. 222), and whose will, in the "Oresteia," as in the Homeric Epics, is in perfect conformity with that of his Father; thus, as the god of prophecy, and the guardian of the sacred oracles, he declares, most emphatically, that he is simply the expounder of his Father's will, and consequently that he cannot lie. (Eum. 585, 588.)

Still greater is the divergence between the Homeric and the Æschylean conception of the maiden goddess, Pallas Athene, in connection with whom, in the "Iliad," traces of meteoric symbolism may still be discerned.

Nevertheless, in the Homeric poems, she decidedly appears as the grandest figure in the Olympian Hierarchy. The high functions there attributed to Apollo, as the hearer and answerer of prayer, and as giving to mortals

visible signs of coming events, are exercised by her, in even a superior degree. Like him, also, she acts inwardly upon the human mind; her agency, however, is for evil as well as for good; thus, while restraining the wrath of Achilles (Il. i. 125), and breathing valour into Diomedes (Il. v. 125) and other Hellenic heroes, she is represented also as hardening the hearts of the suitors, "whom she suffers not to abstain from biting scorn." (Od. xviii. 346.) Imposing, however, as is the Homeric Athene, she is, as before observed, not above the practice of deceit, while the relation of the bright, heaven-sprung goddess to her father, Zeus, whose purposes she habitually thwarts, and for whom she expresses her contempt in no measured terms, is, in general, menacing and hostile.

If from the insubordinate, we may almost say the rebellious, goddess of Homer, we turn to the Athene of Æschylus, the grand impersonation of the wisdom, benignity and might of her father, we recognize, as before, the emergence of the classical ideal from the symbolizing tendencies of the earlier nature-worship; and when we contemplate her majestic image, as portrayed in "The Eumenides," we are not surprised to learn that, even in the fifth century of the christian era, she still continued to command the love and veneration of her votaries.

Æschylus, being the son of a priest of Eleusis, would doubtless be early initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries, the high spiritual value of which, as bringing home to the minds of their votaries, under the most impressive symbols, the fundamental truths of religion, is attested not only by numerous writers of classical antiquity, including Cicero and Plutarch, but also by the fathers of the christian church.

Among the truths thus inculcated, supposed to have been derived originally from Egypt, the existence of one eternal god, the source of all things, and the immortality of the soul, occupy a prominent place.

Thus in the Orphic hymns, supposed to have been

recited in the celebration of the mysteries, Zeus is characterized as "The All-parent, the Principle and End of all."

"Zeus is first, Zeus last, Origin of all, King of all ;
One power, one ruler, one god."¹

It is with deep interest that we thus obtain a glimpse into the source from which Æschylus may have derived his grand conception of the Olympian Zeus, which he has so magnificently embodied in his dramas.

The most interesting figure, however, in connection with the Eleusinian mysteries is Demeter, whose history we can trace from her first appearance in the "Iliad," where she presides over the winnowing-floor, and other agricultural pursuits (Il. v. 500, xxi. 76), but without divine significance, to her transformation into the venerable goddess of the mysteries, the great Earth-Mother, the embodiment of nature's productive energies, more especially in connection with the golden grain, and who, in association with her daughter Persephone, became to her votaries the mystic symbol of immortality. She was, moreover, the classical type of bereaved motherhood, and, seeking solace for her own unutterable woe, in kind and helpful service, she offers, perhaps, the nearest pagan approximation to the christian ideal.

In the Homeric Epics, Persephone appears as the dread goddess of the nether world, the queen of the dead, without any connection with Demeter; the story of her abduction by Aïdoneus, together with the compromise, sanctioned by Zeus, in accordance with which she was to spend one-third of the year with her husband in the nether world, and the remaining two-thirds with Demeter, alluded to by Hesiod, is related, with variations, in the Homeric hymn to Demeter, which dates from the sixth century B.C. The disappearance and return of Persephone, typifying the burial of the seed, and its rebirth in spring, was doubtless one of the agencies employed in the mysteries, as illustrating the survival of the soul after death, and so of enforcing

¹ Quoted in "The Unknown God," by Loring Brace.

the doctrine of human immortality. That, in accordance with this doctrine, Æschylus believed in the life beyond the grave, is attested by many passages in his tragedies. Thus Agamemnon is implored by Electra and Orestes to aid the latter to execute the deed of vengeance assigned to him by Apollo. Thus also the shades of Clytemnestra and of Darius return from Hades, to take part in the doings of the upper world. Nevertheless, in the Æschylean dramas, the future state is involved in impenetrable gloom; the shadowy spirits of the departed, as there portrayed, recall the joyless phantom of Achilles and of other Hellenic heroes, encountered by Odysseus, on his descent into Hades.

It seems strange that, while in his characterization of the Olympian divinities, especially of Zeus, Æschylus should have so immeasurably transcended the earlier poet, he should, with reference to the unseen world, have remained, so to speak, upon the Homeric level; this is the more remarkable, as the blessedness of the righteous after death, was one of the lessons inculcated by the mysteries.

Peculiar interest attaches to the functions attributed to the Erīnyes in the Homeric poems. Originally the impersonation of Curses pronounced upon the wrongdoer, they are represented, in the Homeric system, as inhabiting the gloomy region beneath the earth, whence they issue at the cry of the injured, their aid being chiefly invoked as the Avengers, when the sanctities inhering in natural relations, have been violated. (Il. ix. 434, xv. 204.)

While in some passages they appear as upholding the right and punishing the wrong (Il. xix. 259-260), and as thus vindicating the immutable order of the universe, their functions are not invariably exercised in harmony with the moral law; thus, strange to say, it is "Erīnys who walketh in darkness," whom Agamemnon accuses, together with Zeus and Destiny, of having fired his breath with frenzy, when he provoked the wrath of Achilles. (Il. xix. 86-87.)

While intimately allied to the Clothonian divinities, they are introduced occasionally as acting in opposition to the Olympians; thus when the horse of Achilles, endowed by Hera with human speech, prophecies the hero's impending doom, it is the Erīnyes who interfere to stop his voice for ever. (Il. xix. 413.) The Æschylean conception of the Erīnyes will be considered in another connection.

That human affairs are under the guidance of a super-human power "that makes for righteousness," is a conception underlying the Homeric poems, as evinced by the Fall of Ilium, consequent upon the crime of Paris; while in the "Odyssey," the destruction of the suitors is represented as the express device of Athene. (Od. xxiv. 479.)

Nevertheless, in the "Iliad," the vindication of the moral law is a conception foreign to the Olympian deities; swayed by motives purely personal, and often of the lowest character, they take part in the quarrel, and appear arrayed against one another in the hostile ranks.

In the Æschylean trilogy, on the contrary, the vindication of the divine government is the poet's primal aim; accordingly, the inexorable law of retribution, which binds together suffering and wrongdoing, assigned in the "Iliad" to the Erīnyes, appears, in the "Oresteia," under the immediate guardianship of the Olympian deities, and is enforced with an earnestness of conviction which recalls the weighty utterances of the Hebrew prophets.

In the opening chorus of the "Agamemnon," Zeus is represented as conducting in person the grand judicial retribution, which, in consequence of the crime of Paris, involves Ilium in ruin.

In the second chorus, and also in the third, this providential action on the part of Zeus is brought out with even stronger emphasis; and whereas in the "Iliad," there is division in heaven, in the "Oresteia" the deities are represented as leagued with Zeus in carrying out the great ends of justice. Thus, when the cause is brought before the celestial tribunal, "without dissentient voice,

they cast their votes into the bloody urn, sealing the doom of Troy." (Ag. 789.)

Nor, in the "Oresteia," is it alone in connection with the destruction of Ilium that the principle of retributive justice, as conceived by Æschylus, is vindicated. Opposing the popular notion that the gods, jealous of human eminence, overwhelmed its possessor in inevitable ruin, irrespective of moral considerations, he proclaimed the great principle that "as a man soweth, so shall he reap." Nevertheless, he accepted, with certain limitations, the belief in an hereditary curse, which he represents as working in the family of the Tantalides, over the guilty members of which, from the initial crime of their progenitor, brood the Erinyes, the dread ministers of divine vengeance, when the moral order of the universe has been violated.

In this character they appear in "The Eumenides," where, like bloodthirsty hounds, they pursue Orestes, who, by the murder of his mother, has carried on the hereditary curse; they take cognizance only of the outward act, and exercise their functions with the inflexibility of natural law. At length, however, through the intervention of Apollo and of Pallas Athene, the action of the curse is arrested; Orestes is tried before the court of Areopagus; righteous regard is paid to the motives which prompted the deed, for which he is exposed to the vengeance of the Erinyes; he is acquitted, Pallas Athene herself giving the casting vote.

The higher character attributed by Æschylus to the dread goddesses, finds striking expression in the grand ode assigned to them, immediately before the commencement of the trial, and from which I am tempted to quote the following stanzas :

ANTISTROPHE II.

Throned in the heart let Awe,
Guardian of sacred law
There hold her steadfast reign !
Well-earned is wisdom at the cost of pain,

But who in blithesome cheer
That lives, absolved from fear,
Or man, or state, will justice long revere ?

ANTISTROPHE III.

This, the sum of wisdom, hear ;—
Justice' altar aye revere,
Nor ever dare,
Lusting after worldly gear,
With atheist foot to spurn ; beware,
Lurketh Retribution near,
Direful issue doth impend ;
Honour then with holy fear
Thy parents,—household rights revere,
Nor guest-observing ordinance offend.

We are thus prepared for the denouement of this wonderful drama, wherein, after the trial, through the persuasive entreaties of Pallas Athene, "The Dread Brood of Night," their wrath appeased, are metamorphosed into the Eumenides, the beneficent deities. Forsaking the nether gloom, they consent to dwell in upper air, there to be worshipped with the Olympians.—

"Awful dispensers of the Right,
In every human home confessed,
In every age made manifest
By righteous visitations ; aye revered,
And, everywhere, of deities most feared."

Thus was symbolized the process by which the instinctive thirst for revenge, the law of retribution in its rudimentary form, was transmuted into the great principle of eternal justice.

Thus also is enforced the important principle that, in the sphere of morals, judgment must be passed, not upon the outward act, but upon the inward impulse which impelled the agent to its commission.

This principle which, in the "Oresteia" of Æschylus, is vindicated through the agency of supernatural powers, in the "Œdipus Coloneus" of Sophocles is wrought out through the gradual development, in the mind of Œdipus, of his own moral convictions.

Like his predecessor, Sophocles enforces the pagan conception of retribution, which, in his dramas, as in those of Æschylus, displays itself as a heritage of crime, descending from generation to generation, till at length, by submission to the heavenly mandates, on the part of one of the descendants, the divine justice is satisfied, and the working of the curse is stayed.

While, however, with the elder dramatist, the predominant sentiment is that of stern indignation against the violator of the heaven-established order, the sympathies of Sophocles are with the sufferer, with whose tragic destiny he awakens, in the hearts of his audience, the profoundest pity and commiseration.

Thus, by the murder of his father, and by marriage with his mother, Œdipus unconsciously carries on the heritage of crime inherent in his family. On the first discovery of his twofold stain, overwhelmed with horror, and believing himself to be an object most hateful to the gods, he passionately craves an ignominious death. Blind, helpless, and curse-laden, he wanders forth, a wretched fugitive, attended only by Antigone. With the lapse of time, however, when his fierce anguish is in some measure assuaged, he rises to the conviction that the terrible deeds which have overwhelmed him and his family in ruin, having been wrought in ignorance, cannot be imputed to him as crimes. At the same time he recognizes the pagan doctrine of expiation, in accordance with which punishment must follow the commission of crime, even when it falls upon the innocent descendant of the perpetrator; or when, as in his own case, the divine order has been unconsciously violated. Hence, while proclaiming his freedom from moral guilt, far from rebelling against the dreadful penalties which have followed his involuntary crimes, he bows submissively to the divine decree, and on learning that a blessing waits upon the possession of his tomb, which, after his death, will become a source of prosperity to Attica, the land which has afforded him a hallowed resting-place, he recognizes that, notwithstanding the wretchedness of his

outward lot, he is, in spirit, no longer estranged from the supernal powers. He is thus prepared for the sacred peace which awaits him in the grove of the Erinyes, the dread goddesses, who, after pursuing their victim with life-long fury, at last, reconciled and appeased, receive him into their sanctuary. The solemn silence reigning there, broken only by the song of the nightingale, is in harmony with the profound mystery which envelopes his departure from this earthly sphere, whence, arrayed as for a solemn festival, and summoned by subterranean thunder, he disappears from mortal ken.

Thus was anticipated by the great Hellenic dramatist one of the profoundest lessons of christianity, namely, that while the external consequences attending any violation of the divine order cannot be annulled, it is the inward disposition of the wrongdoer which determines the attitude towards him of supernal power.¹ Nevertheless, the terrible curse pronounced by *Œdipus* upon his unnatural sons, while revealing the poet's sense of the sacredness of the tie which they have violated, reveals also the wide chasm which separates the spirit of paganism from that of christianity. This divergence is strikingly exhibited in the "*Antigone*" of Sophocles, which, through the voice of the heroine, gives forcible expression to the perplexity awakened in classical antiquity by the calamities of the virtuous, consequent, not unfrequently, upon the observance of the moral law. This perplexity on the part of *Antigone*, which will appear from a brief epitome of the drama, together with her pathetic appeal for a clearer revelation as to the divine will, may be regarded as prophetic of christianity.

In the earlier stages of psychical development, the only bonds of union recognized by men would be those of the family and of the clan. With the progress of civilization, the area within which moral obligations were binding

¹ I am interested to find that my interpretation of the "*Œdipus Coloneus*" is in harmony with that of Prof. Butcher, with whose "*Essay on Sophocles*" I have become acquainted since writing the above.

was gradually extended, and the idea of duty, at first confined to the clan, came at length to embrace the state. Accordingly, within these comparatively narrow limits, opportunities would occur for the subordination of selfish interests to the claims of kindred, and to the welfare of the community. Such disinterested conduct being essential to the well-being, sometimes indeed to the very existence of the state, would, in those early ages, be held in the highest honour. Light is thus thrown upon the two cardinal virtues glorified by Æschylus in the "Oresteia," by Sophocles in his "Electra" and his "Antigone," and by Euripides in many noble dramas, namely, loyalty, at whatever cost, to the claims of blood and of the state, the latter being regarded by the Hellenes as an object of intense affection and reverence. By them the subordination of individual rights to those of the state was regarded as a fundamental and irrevocable principle. In the "Antigone" of Sophocles, these claims are represented as antagonistic, and the question is raised, which of the two is to be regarded as paramount. Polyneikes, the son of Œdipus, having invested Thebes with an alien host, is opposed by Eteocles, and, in accordance with the curse of Œdipus, the hostile brothers perish by each other's hand. While funeral honours are decreed to Eteocles, as the defender of the fatherland, an edict has been proclaimed by Creon, prohibiting, on pain of death, the burial of Polyneikes, as a traitor to the state. The justice of this edict is unquestioned except by Antigone, who, bidding defiance to the enactment of the king, performs for her brother the rites of sepulture, thereby making herself liable to the threatened penalty of death. In estimating the conduct of Antigone, it must be remembered that, in accordance with Hellenic belief, upon the due performance of those rites depended the welfare of the departed spirit in the nether world. At the conclusion of "The Seven Against Thebes," the statute ordaining that Polyneikes, "the ravager of his country, cursed of ancestral gods," "shall be cast forth, unburied, the prey of dogs," is proclaimed by the herald in the

name, not of an arbitrary king, but in that of "Cadmeia's Senators, they who rule Cadmeia's land." Antigone, in reply, declares to Cadmeia's rulers that, if none will join in burying her brother, she will herself incur the risk, exclaiming, "dread tie the common womb from which we sprang."

It would appear as if Æschylus, by the determination of the chorus, one half of whom follow, with Antigone, the corse of Polyneikes, and the other half, Ismene, with that of Eteocles, had intended thus to recognize the equal sacredness of the principles, represented respectively by the sisters, namely, allegiance to the holy tie of kindred-blood, and fealty to the state.

In the drama of Sophocles, the claims of the state are represented by Creon, who enforces the duty of absolute obedience to human law as the only safeguard against anarchy.

The doctrine of obedience to law, as the only legitimate sovereign, even when its action was unjust, was upheld by Plato and other writers. Antigone, on the other hand, regards the burial of her brother as a religious act, and accordingly, in justifying her conduct, she appeals to the unwritten statutes of heaven, which, as she says, are not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and whose authority cannot be cancelled by the enactments of any human ruler.

This collision between the claims of blood-relationship, under the guardianship of the infernal deities, and of law, as representing the state, both objects in Hellas of the profoundest reverence, would be followed with intense interest by an Athenian audience.

The claim of the state to unconditional obedience has been maintained by the chorus, by whom the act of Antigone, in burying her brother, is denounced as that of a rebel. "Thou hast rushed forward," they exclaim, "to the utmost verge of daring, and against that throne where Justice sits on high, thou hast fallen, my daughter, with a grievous fall."¹

¹ I quote Prof. Jebb's translation.

Infinitely pathetic is the yearning for human sympathy on the part of Antigone, as "unwept, unfriended, without bridal-song," she is led forth to her "eternal prison in the caverned rock." Nevertheless, she finds solace in the thought that she goes to find her beloved ones, "whom Persephone hath already received among the dead." "I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to thee, my mother, and welcome, brother, to thee; for when ye died, with mine own hands I washed and dressed you, and poured drink offerings at your graves." She is evidently sorely perplexed by the apparent acquiescence of the gods in her terrible doom, and continues thus: "And now, Polyneikes, 'tis for tending thy corpse that I win such recompense as this. And what law of heaven have I transgressed? Why, hapless one, should I look to the gods any more,—what ally should I invoke,—when by piety I have earned the name of impious? Nay, then, if these things are pleasing to the gods, when I have suffered my doom, I shall come to know my sin."

The question set forth in the drama, left unsettled by the attitude of the chorus, and by the doubt which, before her final departure, disturbed the mind of Antigone, is solved by the prophet Tiresias. He proclaims that the denial of sepulture to the dead, defrauding the gods of the nether world of their due, is an offence committed against religion, and that, therefore, the Avenging Destroyers, the Erinyes of Hades and of the gods, will lie in wait to punish the criminal, and will bring dire calamities upon the state. This argument brings conviction home to the chorus and to Creon, and doubtless embodies the truth which it was the object of the poet to enforce.

The importance of this decision will be more fully recognized, when we remember the tendency in Hellas to subordinate the individual to the state. What terrible evils might result from the application of this principle when carried out to its full extent, finds striking illustration in "The Republic" of Plato, where the supposed

welfare of the state is regarded as an object of such paramount importance as to override the most sacred affections of the human heart.

The virtue of unselfish devotion to family claims is exhibited by Euripides in three beautiful characters, Alkestis, Macaria, and Andromache, the first being willing to die for her husband, the second for her brothers, and the third for her son.

For examples of fidelity to the state, we must turn to the heroic self-sacrifice of Menceus in "The Phœnissæ," and to Iphigenia, in the last scene of "Iphigenia in Aulis." Another phase of the same virtue is portrayed in the beautiful character of Polyxena.

The heroism and self-devotion exhibited by these noble creations, appeal more powerfully to our imagination, and awaken profounder sympathy, when considered in connection with the belief in human sacrifice, as a means of propitiating the gods, one of the deadliest features of paganism. This belief, while entering as a fundamental element into the "Oresteia" of Æschylus, and the "Electra" of Sophocles, assumes peculiar prominence in the dramas of Euripides.

In passing from the works of the elder dramatists to those of their successor, a striking contrast is apparent, in regard not only to the orthodox religion of Hellas, but also to those mythical and legendary personages, who, deriving their lineage directly from the Hellenic divinities, were, at the same time, the recognized ancestors of the Hellenes, thus forming the connecting link between them and their deities, and who, consequently, were the traditional objects of popular veneration.

The difference is doubtless due, in great measure, to the altered spirit of the age; Æschylus and Sophocles appear to have accepted, without question, the deities of the popular mythology, whom they invested with attributes fitted to command the homage of their votaries. It was, however, impossible that a system fundamentally false, like polytheism, howsoever glorified by poetic genius and fervent faith, should hold its ground against the

spirit of investigation which characterized the age. Euripides, the friend and disciple of Anaxagoras, in sympathy with the sceptical tendencies of the Periclean epoch, could not but look with contempt upon the popular mythology; accordingly, he does not hesitate to denounce the immoralities attributed by the ancient poets to the gods. (Ion, 444, Herc. F. 342-347, 1316-1319, 1341-1346.) Passages to the same effect might be largely multiplied; nor does he scruple to introduce upon the stage demi-gods and heroes, not under the noble and dignified aspect assigned to them by tradition, but brought down to the low standards of everyday Athenian life. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the antagonistic attitude which he occasionally assumed towards the traditional beliefs of Hellas, his dramas afford abundant evidence that he was at heart a truly devout man, deeply impressed by the solemn mystery of life, and desirous of raising his audience to a higher level of religious thought. It would appear, indeed, from some passages in his dramas, that he had risen to the sublime conception of one divine intelligence, supreme alike over gods and men, whom he characterized as "The all-seeing one, Himself unseen," recalling the words of the ancient hymn, sung at the mysteries,—

"He worketh through all, was never seen by mortal eyes, and doth Himself see every one."

This belief in one supreme deity, was not inconsistent with his recognition of subordinate divinities, whose power and authority could not be braved with impunity, and through whose agency humanity was brought into closer association with the divine; moreover, the ancient myths were not unfrequently employed by him as media for conveying moral and spiritual truth. In order to appreciate the attitude assumed by Euripides towards the traditional beliefs of Hellas, it must be remembered that, coming down from a remote antiquity, and intertwined with every fibre of the national life, they were devoutly accepted by the great body of his countrymen; his own dramas, moreover, being dedicated to the national religion, he could not but pay it a certain measure of

homage and respect. The fate of Anaxagoras who, on a charge of impiety, had been banished from Athens, having, through the eloquence of Pericles, narrowly escaped being put to death, was a warning to the religious reformer, and enables us to appreciate the courage of Euripides in the efforts which he made in that direction.

While philosophy was awakening men's minds to the absurdities of the popular mythology, their reverence for truth, for religion, for ancient tradition, and for law, was being undermined by the sophists, whose object was not truth but persuasion, and who too frequently prided themselves upon making the worse appear the better reason. Accordingly, in the dramas of Euripides are reflected, not only the sceptical tendencies in regard to the popular mythology which characterized the more advanced thinkers of the Periclean age, but also the all-prevailing passion for rhetoric, the poetical embodiment of which could not fail to be acceptable to an Athenian audience.

Although for grandeur of conception, and dignity of portraiture, surpassed by his mighty predecessors, nevertheless, as the powerful delineator of human passion, and of the primal affections of human nature, as the creator also of many typical characters, a galaxy of noble heroes and heroines, with which he has enriched the imagination of humanity, Euripides occupies a distinguished place among the poets, not only of Hellas, but of the world; very noteworthy, moreover, is the wide range of his sympathies, and the great variety of characters introduced by him upon the stage, including even the despised slaves, a numerous class at Athens, for whom he evidently felt the deepest commiseration, and whom he not unfrequently makes the vehicle of moral instruction, "a courageous step," observes Prof. Paley, "for it was one that was certain to lead him into obloquy."

Comprehensive as is the poet's survey of life, embracing all sorts and conditions of men, it bears the impress

of that profound sadness which, resulting from the recognition of the shortness and instability of human existence, found expression in the sentiment that death is better than life;—a sentiment to which, on more than one occasion, our poet gives utterance, and which the Hellenes have embodied in their legendary lore. Nor does the picture of the world beyond the grave, in the dramas of Euripides, offer any compensation for the pains and sorrows of our mortal life; the dead are there spoken of either as unconscious, or as the shadowy denizens of Pluto's gloomy realm.

It is as the poet of a transitional age, when traditional beliefs were passing away, when thoughtful men, feeling after higher truth, were longing for a clearer vision of unseen realities, that Euripides must be regarded as marking a definite stage in the onward progress of humanity; while, by investing the heroic personages of Hellenic tradition with the interests and passions of ordinary life, Euripides, according to Prof. Jebb, must be regarded also as inaugurating the great movement of transition from the purely Hellenic drama to the romantic, "of which he became the virtual founder."

The Æschylean dramas, and those also of Sophocles, were, as we have seen, employed by their authors as vehicles for the solemn exposition of their principles, religious and political. Euripides, while departing widely from the severity of his predecessors, and though his scenes, occasionally, border on the comic, nevertheless, maintained, for the most part, the earnest tone which characterized the elder dramatists.

The picture of the Dionysiac festival, thus reflected in the tragic mirror, would, however, be incomplete, unless supplemented by some notice of Attic comedy, "which sprang from the same germ as her graver sister," and which found in Aristophanes its highest representative.

On the transference to Athens of the Dionysiac festivities, their graver elements, detaching themselves from the drunken revelry and exuberant mirth, wherewith the

Bacchic rites had been celebrated in the rural districts, formed the basis of Athenian tragedy.

After a considerable interval, the Satyr-drama was also transported to the capital, where, through the genius of successive comic poets, while retaining its original characteristics, thus restoring to the Dionysiac rites the elements which had been eliminated by the tragedians, it was moulded into a work of art, and, in regard to form, was brought into harmony with the tragedies of the Athenian stage, the performance of which it succeeded as an after-piece.

That the Dionysiac comedy, when performed before an Athenian audience, as part of a religious ceremonial, should have been allowed to retain its grosser features, its licentiousness, its buffoonery and indecency, features which so deplorably disfigure the comedies of Aristophanes, cannot but excite surprise. It must, however, be remembered, in explanation of so strange a phenomenon, that the religion of Hellas was founded upon the worship of the great nature-powers, irrespective of moral considerations, while Dionysus himself, the deity specially honoured by the performance, was the divine representative of nature's productive energy, as exhibited pre-eminently in the fruitage of the vine. It must also be remembered that the Dionysiac licence which characterized the Attic comedy, reflected, in an exaggerated form, one phase of ordinary Athenian life, indications of which may be found also in the dramas of Euripides ; thus the only divinities who are there represented as punishing with death those by whom their worship was slighted, are, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, in "The Hippolytus," and Dionysus, the vintage-god, in the "Bacchæ." This subordination of the higher to the lower elements of human nature, under the sanction of religion, offers one of the most striking contrasts between paganism and christianity.

To amuse the audience was, however, by no means the only function of the Attic comedian ; and additional value attaches to the comedies of Aristophanes as ex-

hibiting a new side of Athenian life during the later Periclean and subsequent generation.

As public censor, regarding the guidance and instruction of the people as an important part of his mission, he took cognizance of the leading topics of the day, and, availing himself of the immunity of the stage, he did not scruple to hold up to ridicule not only the leading personages of the state, but also the Athenian people, the *Demos*; nor did he spare even the gods themselves. A conservative in politics, regarding with aversion the democratic tendencies which had manifested themselves in Athens subsequently to the Persian war, he assailed with passionate hostility Cleon, Hyperbolus, and their fellow-demagogues, whose malpractices had, in his judgment, brought disgrace upon the Athenian people.¹

It appears from the few remaining fragments that, in his lost comedy, "The Babylonians," Aristophanes had aimed at exposing and denouncing the extortion and oppression which, under cover of Athenian supremacy, were practised upon the subject states, and had thereby drawn upon himself the vengeance of Cleon.

In the *Parabasis*, introduced into "The Acharnians," his oldest existing comedy, the poet, speaking in his own name, having adverted to his ill-treatment at the hands of Cleon, distinctly avows that the object of his former comedy had been to expose the iniquitous policy of the democracy towards the allies, together with the tyrannical and fraudulent acts, which, in his judgment, poisoned the politics of Athens. He glories in the courage and zeal which had prompted him to render this service to the commonwealth, and declares his conviction that, when the allies arrive, bringing their tribute, they will be anxious to see their protector, the bard who had dared to attack the strong and to defend the weak. He then bids defiance to Creon, caring nothing for his rage or his rhetoric, and proclaims his determination, in spite of intimidation, to be true to the cause of justice and of right.

¹ See J. H. Frere's translation of "The Acharnians."

Peculiar interest attaches to this early Parabasis, as revealing the spirit of earnest patriotism with which the poet had entered upon his dramatic career. This plain speaking is, however, foreign to the poet's ordinary procedure. The grave lessons underlying the Aristophanic comedies are, for the most part, so cunningly concealed behind a fantastic veil of allegory, travesty and caricature, woven by the poet's transcendent imagination, that they might easily elude the observation of the spectator, who would probably have rebelled, had the didactic purpose of the poet been too obtrusively displayed. A zealous advocate of peace, he exerted his most strenuous efforts to check the reckless lust of dominion and avidity for conquest which had taken possession of the Athenian people, and of which the Syracusan expedition was the disastrous result.

Nor was it in the domain of politics alone that Aristophanes endeavoured to counteract those tendencies and principles which, in his judgment, threatened to undermine the republic. Cherishing a loyal attachment to the educational system of the olden time, he viewed with special disgust the teaching of the sophists, whom he regarded as prime agents in corrupting the Athenian youth, and as tending to impugn the national religion. Unfortunately, his want of sympathy with the intellectual movement of the age blinded him to the true character of the philosophers of different schools, who were carrying on their researches in various departments of knowledge, all of whom he confounded with the sophists; while Socrates, their earnest opponent, was caricatured by him as their typical representative.

Notwithstanding this grievous error, and its occasional indecency, "*The Clouds*," in which he brings to bear against the sophists his keenest shafts of ridicule, may justly be regarded as one of the poet's master-works.

In the sphere of literature, the conservative proclivities of Aristophanes manifested themselves in his antipathy to Euripides, who, as a literary innovator, and from his sophistical tendencies, shared the animosity with which

he regarded the demagogues and sophists, and whom he made the butt of his remorseless banter.

In "The Wasps," the poet satirizes the Athenians' love of litigation; while in "The Birds," he ridicules what has been characterized as "their inveterate gullibility,"¹ leading them to adopt any scheme, however audacious, which promised to gratify their inordinate ambition. Any more detailed account of the comedies of Aristophanes would here be out of place. Suffice it to say, that he takes rank among the immortals, not so much in virtue of his transcendent comic genius, which, notwithstanding his much-to-be-regretted licentiousness and buffoonery, he made subservient to what he regarded as the highest interests of his country, but as a poet who, for brilliant and delicate fancy, and exquisite beauty of expression, has rarely been surpassed.

I cannot perhaps more appropriately conclude this brief notice of Aristophanes, than by quoting the tribute paid to his poetic genius by Prof. Jebb, who thus writes of the great Attic comedian :

"His truest and highest faculty is revealed by those bits of lyric writing, in which he soars above everything that can move laughter and tears, and makes the clear air thrill with the notes of a song as free, as musical, and as wild as that of the nightingale, invoked by his own chorus in "The Birds."

After referring to some passages, which he characterizes as the true glories of Aristophanes, he proceeds as follows: "Nothing else in Greek poetry has quite this wild sweetness of the woods. Of modern poets, Shakespeare alone, perhaps, has it, in combination with a like richness and fertility of fancy."

Great as was the contrast between the denizens of Olympus, as reflected in the Homeric poems and in the dramas of Æschylus and Sophocles, equally striking is that between the political system of the prehistoric age, and those which prevailed in Hellas, during the fifth

¹ J. A. Symonds.

century before the Christian era. On reaching the latter epoch, we find the royal power still holding its ground in Sparta; it was, however, shared by two hereditary kings, whose authority, to a certain extent, was under the control of a cabinet, consisting of five members, selected by the citizens. In Athens, on the contrary, the hereditary king, and also the Boulé or Council, have disappeared, and have given place to an intense repugnance, not only to monarchical rule, but also to individual pre-eminence; while the Agora, the position of which, as represented in the "*Iliad*," is completely subordinate, has become the prime source of authority, and the ruling power in the state.

In the meantime there had been developed in Hellas the conception of the State, the ideal impersonation, as it were, of the entire community, to the real or supposed advantage of which the claims of individual citizens were inexorably subordinated, and the perfection of which was regarded as an object of paramount importance. Very lofty, as we have seen, was the function assumed by Æschylus, in his efforts to elevate the popular conception of the national deities, and, by investing with deep and solemn meaning the legends of the ancient mythology, to bring them into harmony with the intellectual movement of the age; nor is it surprising that, in the sphere of politics, as well as in that of religion, he should have sought, through the medium of his dramas, to give expression to his convictions, and to recommend to his fellow-citizens the course which he regarded as conducive to their best and highest interest.

In his boyhood, he had witnessed the expulsion of Hippias and the birth of the Athenian democracy under Clisthenes; a revolution which established the principles of free speech and equal laws. In his manhood he had fought at the battle of Marathon, and in his magnificent trilogy of which "*the Persians*" forms the second and only surviving member, he celebrates the triumph of civilization over barbarism, of freedom over the despotic

force of personal will, as represented by the contending powers of Hellas and of Persia.

He could not, however, view without alarm the rapid progress of the democratic spirit, after the termination of the war, when the Thetes, the lowest of the four classes of Athenian citizens, were declared eligible for all public offices, including those of Archon and of Areopagite, from which they had been excluded by Solon. Fearing lest, from the unrestricted participation of the populace in public affairs, political liberty should degenerate into licence, and regarding the Areopagus, the very existence of which was threatened, as the bulwark of the constitution, he employed his powers as a dramatist, to commend to his fellow-citizens, this august and venerable tribunal. Accordingly, in "the Eumenides," he represents Pallas Athene herself as assembling the Areopagites before whom Orestes, under the guardianship of Apollo, was to be arraigned by the Erinyes, the avengers of his guilt in shedding his mother's blood. It would be difficult to imagine a more impressive means of recommending this tribunal to the reverence of the Athenians, than thus to introduce the celestial powers as assisting at its inauguration. "A splendid example," it has been truly said, "of the possibility of creating a great poem for a special purpose, without depriving it, on that account, of a nobleness which leaves it a model for all ages."¹

Cherishing the warmest admiration for Aristides and Cimon, Æschylus sympathized with their Hellenic policy, desiring with them that Athens should cultivate friendly relations with Sparta, and the other chief states of Hellas, without aspiring to hold dominion over them; his dramas accordingly were devoted, for the most part, to traditions and legendary myths, common to all Hellenes.

Sophocles, on the other hand, the friend of Pericles, who aimed at Athenian supremacy, while keeping aloof from

¹ See Curtius's "History of Greece."

party conflicts, "was," it has been said, "more of an Athenian and an Attic patriot than Æschylus." Hence, in accordance with the aspirations of Pericles, his dramas tended to the glorification of Athens; "his art," to quote the words of the historian, "was a mirror of the loftiest tendencies of the times, a glorified exponent of the spirit of Periclean Athens;"¹ while, at the same time, uninfluenced by the sceptical tendencies of the period, he did not fail to invest with a sacred character the venerable traditions of the national religion.

With regard to the political opinions of Euripides, many passages may be quoted from his dramas, to show that "he was a partisan of the moderate and constitutional party, equally opposed to the tyranny of absolute rulers, and the still worse tyranny of overbearing demagogues." Thus, according to Prof. Paley, he deprecates alike the life of the tyrant (Ion, 625), the position of his subjects (Helen, 276), and the unbridled licence of the mob (Orest. 696). Living during the Peloponnesian war, he was the strenuous advocate of peace, the advantages of which he has set forth in many striking passages. (Sup. 479-493, v. 748, v. 949.)

I have thus endeavoured to indicate very briefly, in the spheres of religion and politics, the progress made by the Hellenes between the prehistoric age, as reflected in the Homeric Epics, and that of the tragedians. In passing on to consider the Hellenic system of morals, together with the wonderful advance towards a more spiritual religion, which, with the collapse of the national mythology, shed a halo over the declining years of Hellas, it will be necessary to consider the utterances of another great creative genius, Plato, who, though employing prose as the vehicle of his muse, was a true poet, and may justly be ranked among the bay-wreathed chorus of the immortal bards. Very wonderful are his lofty flights of philosophic speculation respecting "the Supreme Cause," "the Mind of the universe," the Director and Sus-

¹ Curtius's "History of Greece."

tainer of all things, exempt from the conditions of time and space. Recognizing that human existence is based upon justice and truth, the observance of which is the sole condition of happiness, he rose to the conception that the divine nature must be in harmony with this principle, and accordingly contemplated the Supreme Cause, as Eternal Good, Eternal Beauty, and Eternal Truth. It must, however, be confessed that Plato's "First Principle of things," invested with these high attributes, but to whom it is uncertain whether he attributed self-consciousness and will, is a conception which cannot satisfy the religious instinct implanted in the human soul. Wonderful as were Plato's conceptions respecting "the Supreme Cause," equally noteworthy are his speculations respecting the nature and destiny of man. He had indeed risen to the grand conception that human nature being created in the likeness of the divine nature, men must necessarily find their highest well-being in bringing their reason into harmony with the reason which governs the universe, and as the Immortals gain strength from the contemplation of the True, he regards as the highest prerogative of the human soul, the power of apprehending Truth, and of holding communion with the deity.

Recognizing, moreover, that "there is in all men a godlike and eternal element, which may be latent but not lost," he taught that their likeness to their divine original, when marred by sin, may be restored through the agency of penalties and punishment, if not in this world, then in the world to come, except indeed in the case of those, the magnitude of whose crimes rendered expiation impossible. With regard to the state of the virtuous beyond the grave, unlike Homer and the tragedians, who consigned the good and bad alike to the gloomy reign of Hades, he dwells, with delight, upon the habitations of the blest, the abode of those who have lived pure and holy lives, enjoying the companionship of the gods. Noble as were Plato's conceptions respecting the nature of man, and the

affinity between the divine and human mind, there were certain anomalies in his ethical system which rendered it unavailing for the solution of problems, bearing upon human relations, with their corresponding obligations and responsibilities. Thus the idea of the right was regarded by him as "indistinguishably mingled with that of the True and the Beautiful." "Accordingly, moral claims may be deliberately sacrificed, if other advantages, of an intellectual or imaginative order, can thereby be secured."¹

From the failure of Plato to recognize a divine basis, an eternal ground, of the moral law, together with his conception of the State, as the embodiment of an ideal perfection, to the realization of which the most sacred rights of individuals were to be ruthlessly sacrificed, he manifested a constant tendency to confound the idea of the Right with that of the Expedient. Hence his conception of Moral Obligation, of the distinction between Right and Wrong, appears to have been, not only undefined, but also, not unfrequently, cruelly distorted. Thus we are shocked and startled to find in the writings of Plato, together with the highest flights of philosophic speculation, expressed with the utmost refinement of artistic taste, practices, abhorrent to our moral sense, not only sanctioned but enjoined.

"In his impatience of helplessness and deformity, he recommends the exposure and murder of unpromising infants. To preserve the purity and ascendancy of the Hellenic race, he would consign to slavery its foreign prisoners of war, and even its own hopeless inferiors. In the service of the state, breaches of veracity are freely admitted by him; and to the preconceived perfection of the whole social organism everything is to give way, not the interests only of the individual, but his character."²

When such practices, and others still more revolting, were enjoined by the great Teacher, we cannot feel sur-

¹ "Types of Ethical Theory." James Martineau, D.D., LL.D.

² *Ibid.*

prised at the low standard of morality which characterized the Periclean age, as depicted by its great historian, when prisoners of war by thousands were ruthlessly massacred in cold blood, when women and children were sold into slavery, and when torture, alike of men and women, was the constant practice in the Athenian law courts.¹ With regard to the character of the Athenian women, witness to their prevailing profligacy is borne, not only by the poets and dramatists of Hellas, but also by Aristotle.² Hence, while manifesting the highest development of the purely intellectual powers, especially of those which may be characterized as the æsthetic faculties, the Hellenes, on the moral and spiritual side of their culture, were decidedly deficient. Accordingly, while deeply grateful for the priceless heritage which they have bequeathed to the world, in the marvellous creations of their genius, literary and artistic, we cannot but recognize that, for the development of men's higher nature, other agencies were essential; these, in due time, came into operation, and will subsequently claim our attention.

Meanwhile, we must pass from Hellas to the banks of the Tiber, and dwell briefly upon the poets and poetry of Rome.

¹ See "Social Life in Greece." Rev. J. P. Mahaffy.

² "Treatise on Poetry" (§ 15). Quoted by Prof. Paley.

ROME.

Plautus, B.C. 254.
Q. Ennius, B.C. 259.
Lucilius, B.C. 148.
Lucretius, B.C. 95.

Virgil, B.C. 70.
Horace, B.C. 65.
Lucan, A.D. 39.
Persius, A.D. 34.

“ROMAN POETRY,” it has been said, “was the living heir, not the lifeless copy, of the genius of Greece.”¹

Drawing their inspiration mainly from a patriotic source, their firm belief, namely, in the lofty destiny of Rome, the Latin poets, although, with the exception of Satire, they invented no new poetic forms, succeeded to a certain extent in stamping upon their Hellenic models the impress of their national genius, which differed essentially from that of Greece.

The Romans can, however, make no claim to early poetry of native growth; that title being inappropriate to the *Saturæ*, a rude species of improvisatory farce, with extempore songs and buffoonery, which accompanied their agricultural festivals. The true foundations of Roman literature were laid by Livius Andronicus, a Greek, who (B.C. 242) by his translation of the “*Odyssey*,” and his reproduction of the Greek drama in the Latin language, retaining the metres of the original, awakened in the Roman mind a taste for Hellenic master-works.

Nævius, the first original poet of Rome, in addition to an epic on the first Punic war, having produced several plays, founded on the old comedy of Athens, of which only a few fragments have come down to us, has been

¹ Sellar’s “*Roman Poets of the Republic*,” to which, together with “*Roman Poets of the Empire*,” by the same author, I beg to express my acknowledgments.

styled "the Father of the Roman drama." He was succeeded almost immediately by Plautus, who, in accordance with the bias given to Roman literature by the translations of Livius, founded his comedies upon Hellenic models; nevertheless, while retaining the Hellenic form, he succeeded in impressing upon his plays something of the Roman genius, so that the crowds who frequented the theatre would recognize some features of their national character and life. The same remark is applicable to the Roman tragedies, which, with few exceptions, were either translations from the Greek, especially from Euripides, or were founded upon Hellenic myths and legends. From a few dramatic fragments it is impossible to form a conjecture as to the structure of the Roman tragedies; it may, however, be inferred, from the long sustained popularity enjoyed by the tragic poets that, while deriving their materials from a foreign source, they were not mere copyists, but like the Roman comedians, imparted to their legendary characters some features of their national ideal. This view, moreover, is supported by passages from their dramas, quoted by various Latin authors;—"The rugged maxims hewn from life, which for the most part, exhibit the gravity, simplicity, and austerity, characteristic of the old Roman virtue." It would appear also that the Roman stage was not unfrequently employed as the vehicle for the expression of strong political feelings, the force of which was heightened by allusions to the passing events of the day.

Several passages in Cicero bear witness to this feature of the Roman drama, as well as to its great popularity, and to the enthusiasm awakened by the exhibition of heroic deeds, and to the expression of noble sentiments. Thus, during the scene in which Orestes and Pylades contend which shall suffer for the other, "the audience," he tells us, "stood up, while shouts of applause were heard through the whole body of the House." There was, however, no power of development in the Roman tragic drama which, with the rapid growth of national

corruption, consequent upon the increase of avarice and luxury, was superseded by triumphal processions of wonderful magnificence, by gladiatorial combats, and other brutalizing spectacles; nothing could more strikingly illustrate the degradation in the national character and taste, which culminated under the Empire, than the universal passion then displayed for revolting scenes which gratified, at the same time, the love of splendour and the thirst for blood.

Unlike the Roman dramatists, the Epic poets of Rome, while imitating the Homeric poems in form, drew their materials from the traditionary lore, embodied in their earlier annals, and also from the great events of contemporary history.

Among the early Roman poets, by far the most prominent figure is that of Q. Ennius, B.C. 259-170, esteemed by the Romans as the father of their literature;—the Homer of Italy. Having lived through the terrible conflict which, ending in the destruction of Carthage by the elder Scipio, secured to Rome the empire of the world, he would doubtless share with his fellow-citizens the feelings of intense relief and patriotic exultation awakened by the national triumph, after the agony of doubt and fear which had preceded it. Such seasons of national excitement have, on more than one occasion, made an epoch in the literature of nations. Accordingly, it was at this great crisis of Roman history that Ennius composed his “Annals,” a truly national poem, devoted to the glorification of the Republic,—and pervaded throughout, we are told, by one grand conception, that namely of the lofty destiny of Rome.

“The true poetry of Rome,” it has been said, “lived in its institutions; for whatever of beautiful, true, and majestic they contained, could have sprung only from the faculty which creates the order in which they consist. The life of Camillus; the death of Regulus; the expectation of the senators, in their godlike state, of the victorious Gauls; the refusal of the Republic to make

peace with Hannibal, after the battle of Cannæ, were not the consequences of a refined calculation of the probable personal advantage to result from such a rhythm and order in the shows of life, to those who were at once the poets and the actors of these immortal dramas ;" such was the theme of Ennius.

Exhibiting the institutions of Rome under their grandest aspect, together with the fortitude, energy, and masculine strength inherent in the Roman temper, as manifested in the leading personages of her history, the tendency of "the Annals" was to give stability to the national ideal of duty, and to maintain the dignity and manliness which characterized the manners of the olden time.

This national Epic, though originally longer than the "Iliad," has perished, with the exception of about six hundred lines, which have been preserved in fragments. Lucretius, Cicero, Quintilian, and other Latin authors, speak in terms of high admiration of Ennius, whose popularity was sustained far into the times of the Empire, when, it is recorded, great crowds attended the public reading of "the Annals."

About a century and a half after the triumph of the elder Scipio over Hannibal, there occurred another great crisis in Roman history, the triumph of Julius Cæsar over Pompey (B.C. 48), which assured to the former the mastery over the Roman world ; the details of the struggle, beginning with the crossing of the Rubicon, are embodied in the "Pharsalia," of Lucan. In several passages, characterized by impassioned eloquence, the poet dwells upon the horrors of civil war, deploras the loss of liberty, consequent upon the defeat of Pompey, and deprecates the triumph of Cæsar. In accordance with the principle of human brotherhood, inculcated by the Stoics, he looks forward to the time when, arms laid aside, "Peace shall keep close the iron thresholds of Janus," and expresses the wish that "all nations may love one another." (Phar. 1). In B.C. 32, the victory of Augustus Cæsar over Mark Anthony

brought to a close the long period of anarchy and civil strife which had convulsed the Republic.

The national enthusiasm, awakened by this event, found expression in the "*Æneid*" of Virgil, a poem wherein are mirrored the ideas, sentiments, and aspirations of the Augustine age, and which, from the sustained majesty and exquisite beauty of its versification, and the unrivalled splendour of its descriptions, is invested with an ever-enduring charm.

Since Ennius had composed his "*Annals*," the sway of Rome had been vastly extended, and, with the establishment of the Empire, she aspired to world-wide dominion.

The "*Æneid*," bearing witness to this expansion of the national ideal, is distinguished pre-eminently by the pride of empire, and the sense of national glory. Thus Jupiter is represented as promising to the Roman people "*Empire illimitable*" (i. 278-279). The earliest oracle given to Æneas contains the promise of universal dominion (iii. 97, 98); in the same spirit, the oracular voice from the grove of Faunus proclaims that the sons of Troy shall see the whole broad earth, from ocean to ocean, from the rising to the setting sun, subjected to their sway (vii. 99-101); while, in the sixth book, the mission of Rome is thus summed up: "*Thine be the task, oh Rome, to sway the nations with thy imperial rule*" (vi. 851-853).

With this pride of dominion, we find associated, in many passages, the higher belief, that the ultimate mission of Rome was to bestow upon the world the two-fold blessings of law and peace. This idea of an empire, to which was assigned, by Fate, an eternity of boundless sway, based upon established law, and the pledge of universal peace, an idea which, as we have seen, was the growth of centuries, was the one grand poetical conception which the mistress of the world, on resigning her sway, bequeathed as a heritage to succeeding ages,—a conception which profoundly impressed the imagination of the mediæval world, and of Dante, its highest repre-

sentative. Notwithstanding the halo with which, in the "De Monarchia," Dante, desiring to magnify the Roman people, invests Æneas, whom he characterizes as "their Father," "their most unconquerable and most pious ancestor," and notwithstanding the eulogy passed upon him by Ilioneus, in the first "Æneid," it must be confessed that the weakest feature of Virgil's great poem is the character of the hero, whose moral delinquencies are unredeemed by any noble qualities of head or heart.

The glorification of Augustus, and of the Roman Empire, constitutes in fact the underlying motive of the "Æneid;" nevertheless, that the poet should have ventured to portray the ideal Founder of Imperial Rome under so contemptible an aspect, strikingly illustrates the low moral tone which characterized the Augustine age.

The imagination of the great Florentine poet appears to have been profoundly impressed also, by the descent of Æneas to the shadowy under-world, which forms so interesting an episode in the poem of Virgil, and many features of which are reproduced in that of the mediæval bard. Very striking, as illustrating the progress of humanity, is the contrast between man's future existence, as portrayed in the "Odyssey," the "Æneid," and the "Divina Commedia."

In the three poems the great principle of retribution finds terrible expression in the physical torments of the wicked, among whom, in the "Odyssey," Tantalus and Sisyphus have become the familiar symbols of unsatisfied desire, and of fruitless and never-ending toil.

The hopeless vacuity which, in the heroic age, after death, awaited even the greatest heroes, is reflected in the pathetic question addressed, in the "Odyssey," by the phantom of Achilles to Odysseus: "How durst thou come down to the house of Hades, where dwell the senseless dead, the phantoms of men outworn?" and when he is informed by Odysseus of the honour in which he is held by the Argives, he replies: "Nay, speak not comfortably to me of death, oh great Odysseus; rather would I live on ground as the hireling of another, with a

landless man who has no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead that be departed.”¹

Dreary as is this Homeric presentation of the dead, it would appear, from the examples of Ganymedes (Il. xx. 232, 235), and of Menelaus (Od. iv. 561-569), that the translation of the living to the abode of the gods was an idea not unfamiliar to the heroic age.

From Homer's gloomy picture of Erebus, it is refreshing to turn to Virgil's Elysian fields, where warriors rejoice in their chariots and steeds; where poets sing heroic lays; and where Anchises takes delight in surveying his future progeny, and the glory which was to crown imperial Rome. Nevertheless, we feel that here also we are in an unreal world, a world of phantoms, whose existence is but a faint reflection of their earthly life, and who, after a lapse of ten centuries, having drunk of Lethe's stream, will return to earth, oblivious of all that has gone before, to run the same perpetual round of mortal and of ghostly life.

Very striking is the contrast between this unprogressive existence and that shadowed forth in the “Purgatorio,” and the “Paradiso” of Dante, the underlying idea of which is the soul's ascent to God, and where, consequently, eternal life is identified with eternal progress.

The further consideration of this subject, and of the relation between Virgil and the great mediæval poet, must, however, be reserved for a future occasion.

Very remarkable is the prominence given in the poems of Virgil to the heterogeneous elements curiously blended in the religious sentiments of the period. Thus, in the first “Æneid,” in Jupiter's prophetic description of the Augustine age, after investing Cæsar with boundless empire and with boundless fame, he announces, as another feature of that golden reign, that the temple of Janus shall be closed; that Juno, her fierce anger appeased, shall vie with Jupiter in cherishing the Roman people, while hoary Faith and Vesta, one of the most ancient

¹ “Odyssey,” translated by Butcher and Lang.

deities of Rome, shall be associated with the Olympians in their beneficent sway.

Notwithstanding the frequent appearance of the Olympian divinities in the "*Æneid*," and the prominent part which they play in the action of the poem, belief in their existence, in the Augustine age, had so completely passed away, that this worship had degenerated into a mere lifeless ceremonial; we cannot therefore be greatly surprised that the poet should be so regardless of mythological consistency as to represent Venus as wielding the thunderbolt of Jupiter (viii. 523); while, however, a certain feeling of unreality attaches to the members of the Olympian hierarchy, the poet celebrates with genuine reverence the native rural divinities, "whose task it is to watch over the fields," while due honour is also paid by him to the invisible powers, belonging to remote antiquity, identified with the fortune of particular cities.

These varied religious elements which unite in the poems of the Mantuan bard, would seem to indicate that he still clung to the ancient religious traditions of his country, and cherished the desire to infuse new life into the religious observances of his contemporaries.

Sharing the sentiments of the age, however, he appears to have been blind as to the actual tendency of the views embodied in his poems, in the domain alike of politics and of religion.

Having had ample proof, from his own painful experience, of the violence, disorder, and insecurity which had prevailed throughout Italy during the time of the civil wars, he, in common with his countrymen, regarded Augustus as a saviour, the restorer of national unity, and as inaugurating a reign of law and of everlasting peace.

The sentiments of trust, of loyalty, of unswerving devotion, of which, in the olden time, the Republic had been the object, and which had found expression in "*The Annals*" of Ennius, were now transferred to Augustus, who was regarded as representing, in his own person, the entire majesty of Rome.

Accordingly, it has been said with truth that, "In the 'Æneid,' Virgil is really the panegyrist of despotism, under the delusive guise of paternal government. Under the reign of Augustus, the free political life of Rome was extinguished, patriotism was exchanged for servility, and the prolonged death agony of the empire is recorded in the history of its decline and fall."

With regard to the deification of the emperors, it must not be forgotten that, before the death of Julius Cæsar, divine worship had by the Senate been instituted in his honour. It cannot, therefore, be matter of surprise that the Roman people, dazzled by the unbounded power of Augustus, and grateful for the reign of peace inaugurated by him, regarding him, moreover, as embodying in his own person the genius of Rome, which had long been an object of popular worship, should have joyfully hailed his deification, and have been prepared for the apotheosis of his successors. Moreover, the idea of "an omnipotent imperial fatherhood" introduced an element of order into the supernal sphere, wherein, amid the multitudinous divinities of the Græco-Roman religion, limitless confusion had reigned.¹

Nevertheless, this deification of the emperors rendered any resuscitation of the national religion impossible. In the "Æneid," not only is a divine origin attributed to the emperor; Virgil represents Jupiter himself as declaring that divine honours shall be paid to Augustus (i. 290), and in the first "Georgic," after invoking Neptune, Pan, Minerva, and all the gods and goddesses, he entreats Cæsar "to smile upon his lay, and thus to become accustomed to the voice of prayer before his translation to the skies." Horace also celebrates Augustus as one of the immortals, and Nero, one of the most execrable monsters who ever appeared in human shape, was hailed by Lucan as a god.

Thus perished a system, which, not long before, had been assailed by Lucretius, with all the impassioned fervour which characterized his genius. Almost at the

¹ See "Studies of the Gods in Greece." Louis Dyer, B.A., Oxon.

commencement of his great work, Lucretius represents human life as lying "foully prostrate upon earth, crushed down under the weight of Religion, who showed her head from the quarters of Heaven, with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals." "Often and often," he continues, "that very religion has given birth to sinful and unholy deeds." He then gives a graphic account of the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis, evidently following the description of that heart-rending scene in the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus, and he concludes with the remark: "So great are the evils to which Religion could prompt."¹

"Lucretius, nobler than his mood,
Who dropped his plummet down the broad
Deep universe, and said—'No God,'
Finding no bottom; he denied
Divinely the Divine, and died
Chief poet on the Tiber side."

This high rank may justly be claimed for Lucretius who, while "divinely denying the divine," and fiercely denouncing the idea of supernatural agency, had nevertheless grasped the conception of universal law, as pervading alike the material universe and the domain of human life, through obedience to which men found themselves lifted to a higher level, where they might "hold well-guarded the tranquil heights upraised by the learning of the wise," and might aspire to live a life worthy of the gods; "a conception which he hailed with enthusiasm, as revealing a realm of order, free from the capricious interference of the popular divinities. He recognized, moreover, with a deep sense of religious awe, the majesty and omnipotence of Nature, to which he attributes not only life but creative power. "There is through all his poem a pervading solemnity of tone, as of one awakening to the consciousness of a great invisible power in the world." "The acknowledgment of this power was at least an advance on the superstition and idolatry of the popular religion." "His belief is not atheistic or pantheistic; it is not definite enough to be theistic. It is rather the twilight between an old and a

¹ Lucretius. H. A. J. Munro.

new faith." With all the fervour of conviction, Lucretius advocates the duty of "plain living and high thinking," and, at the same time, enters his earnest protest against the baleful passions and the artificial tastes which, in his age, were rapidly supplanting the sterner virtues and simpler habits of the olden time. In this feature of his moral teaching, Lucretius exhibits something of the satiric spirit so characteristic of the Roman genius, and which, at a somewhat earlier period, had found literary expression in the Satires of C. Lucilius, B.C. 148-103, to whom must be assigned "the honour of having introduced a new and permanent form of poetry into the world." Satire,—which, embracing the wide field of human life, with all its varied interests, social, religious, and political, criticises the manners and the morals of the time, and which, while claiming the greatest liberty of speech, was capable "of passing from playful ridicule to passionate denunciation,"—was peculiarly adapted to the practical genius of Rome, and is accordingly the one literary form which they have brought to perfection, and bequeathed as a legacy to succeeding ages.

Numerous fragments from the Satires of Lucilius have been preserved; according to Horace, "he tore away the veil from private life, and arraigned high and low alike,—showing no favour but to virtue and the virtuous." The satirists of the Empire exhibit the leading characteristics, including the high moral tone, which distinguished Lucilius, the satirist of the Republic; nevertheless, of them, as compared with Lucilius, it has been said, "that the consciousness of his power, as a good hater, is but faintly represented in the arch-pleasantry of Horace, the concentrated intellectual scorn of Persius, or the declamatory indignation of Juvenal."

The old Roman ideal reflected the qualities which lay at the root of the national greatness; namely, willing submission to discipline; self-devoting allegiance to duty; profound veneration for the state and for the national religion, together with the preference of public over private

interests; qualities fostered doubtless by the domestic institutions of Rome, where, from the cradle, the son was trained to unswerving submission to paternal authority, which was as absolute over him as over the slave. Unquestioning obedience to the father passed into filial devotion to the State, which formed so striking an element in Roman virtue, and which has left its impress on the earlier Latin literature.

Thus, a very noble passage which has been preserved from the works of Lucilius, concludes with these words: "It is true worth to look on our country's weal as the chief good; next to that, the weal of our parents; third, and last, our own weal." These prime characteristics of Roman virtue, love of country and filial reverence, are so strikingly exemplified in the words attributed, by our great poet, to Cominius, and Coriolanus, that I am tempted to quote them. Thus Cominius says:

"I do love

My country's good, with a respect more tender,
More holy and profound, than mine own life."—Act iii. Sc. 3.

And again, at the approach of Volumnia, Coriolanus exclaims:

"My mother bows,
As if Olympus to a molehill should
In supplication nod."—Act v. Sc. 3.

Gradually, however, with the growth of the Republic, the old Roman ideal, with its grave and austere virtue, succumbed to the ever-growing lust of conquest, of luxury, and of wealth. Moreover, with the establishment of the Empire, embracing, as it did, a vast number of nationalities, the ideal of the State, which had been the object of passionate devotion alike to the Greek and to the early Roman, ceased to exist. Thus the occupation of the ordinary citizen, to whom political life had been the one object of interest, was gone, while every branch of industry being carried on by slaves, no legitimate sphere was open for the exercise of his powers. Under these circumstances, when men had ceased to be citizens, and when public life was impossible, the nobler minds of the com-

munity found refuge in stoicism, which, in the second century B.C. had been introduced into Rome, by Panætius, and which, under the practical Roman genius, laying aside its theoretic speculations, had become an ethical system, applicable to the conduct of everyday life, and which, in some striking particulars, carried on the tradition of the old Roman virtue, with its simplicity, gravity, and manly austerity. Striking indeed is the contrast between "the fathomless corruption," which prevailed in Rome under the Cæsars, and the exalted morality inculcated by the Stoics, which found expression in the Satires of Persius, and in the still nobler teachings of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. The fundamental principle underlying their system was that enunciated by Plato, namely, that man's highest well-being consists in bringing his reason into harmony with the reason which governs the universe, and which they identified with eternal truth, and eternal justice. Accordingly, they taught that it is the part of the wise man, making himself independent of external things, and unmindful of happiness, to yield himself, with absolute self-surrender, to the divinity within, given to him to be his guardian and his guide. Thus Epictetus exclaims: "For I esteem what God wills to be better than what I will; to Him I yield myself, as a servant and follower."

Considerable interest attaches to the tenth satire of Lucilius as having, it is said, so strongly impressed the mind of Persius, A.D. 34-62, the one Stoic poet together with Lucan, whom Rome can boast, that he was thereby induced to adopt satire as the vehicle of his muse.

His Satires, which are distinguished by their high moral tone, give some ghastly pictures of the corrupt Roman world by which he was surrounded. Very characteristic is the punishment which he assigns, in his third satire, to the oppressors of mankind. "Great Father of the Gods, be it thy pleasure to inflict no other punishment on the monsters of tyranny, after their nature has been stirred by fierce passion, that has the

taint of fiery poison,—let them look upon virtue and pine that they have lost her for ever.”¹

For the most part, however, his Satires are devoted to the exposition of practical morality, “to the art of skilful driving in the chariot-race of life.” Thus, his third satire is an appeal to the youthful idler, who, in harvest time, snores in the broad noon, who calls for his books only to quarrel with them, and who appears, at last, as the lost profligate; a striking illustration of the punishment awaiting those who will not be warned in time.

We find in Persius no trace of the religious development which formed one of the most striking characteristics of the later stoicism, and which found its highest exponent in Marcus Aurelius, who, haunted for ever by the sense of a divine presence, a comforter and guide, believed that these celestial visitations were not his own exclusive privilege, but were the heritage of every human being. The simple piety of Persius finds expression in the second satire, on right and wrong prayers to the Gods, wherein he inveighs against those who, “inferring what the gods like from this sinful pampered flesh of ours,” think to propitiate them with gold and costly sacrifices: “Give me,” he adds, “duty to god and man well blended in the mind, purity in the shrine of the heart, and a racy flavour of nobleness pervading the bosom; let me have these to carry to the temple, and a handful of meal, shall win me acceptance.”

In the fifth satire, after a most touching tribute to his old tutor, Cornutus, he discusses the subject of freedom, which he characterizes as “the one thing needful;” “not, however, the freedom of the enfranchised slave, which could be obtained by the touch of the Prætor’s rod.” He shows how the votaries of avarice, of luxury, and of ambition, are slaves to their own evil passions and low desires, and hints that the only genuine en-

¹ “The Satires of A. Persius Flaccus.” Translated by John Conington, M.A. Edited by H. Nettleship, M.A.

franchisement is that of the mind ; a doctrine enforced with such earnestness of conviction, and variety of illustration, by Epictetus. One of the noblest utterances of stoicism is Cleanthes' "Hymn to Zeus" (B.C. 200). "Hail to thee, most glorious of immortals, O thou of many names, Almighty Zeus, Nature's first cause, governing all things by law. It is the right of mortals to address thee, for we who live and creep upon the earth are all thy children, and to us only is given power of speech like unto thine. Therefore will I sing of thee, and praise thy power for ever.

"Thee doth all this Cosmos obey, rolling about our earth as thou dost guide it, and by thee willingly ruled . . . Thou dost fulfil that universal plan which goes through all things, shining in all the greater and the lesser lights. . . . Thou knowest how to make transgression righteousness, confusion order, and things not lovely are lovely to thee, for thou dost shape to one end all things both good and bad, till one eternal law is brought to light from all . . . Grant us," he continues, "to share that wisdom with which thou dost thyself guide all things . . . There is no greater glory for men or gods than for ever fittingly to sing hymns in praise of thy universal law."¹ Epictetus, one of the latest, as Cleanthes was one of the earliest, expounders of stoicism, cherished also an exalted conception of the Divine Being, "from whom we come and whose children we are," and, like his predecessor, he exhorted men "to sing the praises of the Deity, both in private and in public, and to rehearse his benefits."

Thus, at a time when, with the decline of paganism, the national worship had degenerated into a mere lifeless ritual, and while christianity was looked down upon with supreme contempt by the upper classes of society, stoicism, as inculcated by its highest representatives, might truly be regarded no longer as a philosophy, but as a religion ; it is, moreover, deeply interesting to learn that, though in its direct influence confined apparently

¹ Translated by Prof. J. G. Crosswell, quoted in "The Unknown God." C. Loring Brace.

within very narrow limits, this noble ethical system contributed an important element to human progress.

"From the stoical principle of the brotherhood of man," which finds such forcible expression in the utterances of Epictetus, "came forth," it has been said, "the greatest influence of stoicism—that upon the ideas of Roman jurists, in international law." "These ideas have profoundly influenced modern political thought, and even practical institutions of government; they are the one great bequest of stoicism to modern times." Doubtless also, familiarity with the sublime doctrine of the Stoics respecting the Supreme Being, together with their noble moral teaching, would be instrumental in preparing the upper classes of society for the adoption of christianity. Nevertheless, noble as was, in many respects, the religion of the Stoics, it brought no gospel to earth's suffering millions; it held out no assured belief in the life beyond the grave; it offered no grand individuality, in whom, beholding the realization of their loftiest ideal, men found a common object for their reverence and love: from these and other causes, into which it is here unnecessary to enter, stoicism, while exerting a purifying and elevating influence over the minds of its votaries, never penetrated to the masses of the community, and was utterly inadequate to stem the deep-seated corruption of the Roman Empire, already smitten with irremediable decay.

For the spirit which was to survive the ruin of ancient civilization, consequent upon the Fall of Rome, and which, breathing new life into its scattered fragments, was to reunite them into a living unity, we must look to christianity, as embodied in the Mediæval Church, of which, in the "*Divina Commedia*" of Dante, we possess a poetical epitome.

Before passing, however, from the poets and poetry of classical antiquity, as illustrating the progress of humanity, to those of more modern times, we must return to the East, and consider the sources whence issued the life-giving energy destined to revolutionize the world.

BABYLONIA.

WHILE the poets and artists of Hellas, in fulfilment of their high mission, as "Prophets of the beautiful," were giving birth to their immortal creations; and while Rome was elaborating her system of jurisprudence, and laying the foundation of her vast empire, which rendered possible the diffusion of christianity; the Hebrew poets,—psalmists and prophets,—were, from age to age, developing those fundamental truths of religion upon which christianity is based.

That various elements of Chaldæan mythology entered largely into the Homeric hierarchy of the Olympian divinities; that many Hellenic myths, notably those of Adonis and Aphrodite, of Zeus and Europa, of Perseus and Andromeda, are of Semitic origin; that the culture of the prehistoric Hellenes was stimulated by the higher culture of the Babylonians, to which they had access through Phœnician channels,¹ are considerations which would alone suffice to invest, with the deepest interest, the sacred books of Babylonia. That interest is, however, intensified by the remarkable affinity which is found to exist not only between the poetry of the Chaldæans and that of the Hebrews, but also between many of their traditions and religious observances, as having been derived from a common source.

It is to the valley of the Euphrates that the Hebrews looked as the cradle of their race; Ur of the Chaldees being the reputed birthplace of their father, Abraham; moreover, during the Captivity, a period of seventy years,

¹ See "The Origin of the Aryans," by Isaac Taylor.

they came more directly under the influence of the religious conceptions of Babylonia; hence, the affinity above alluded to, is sufficiently accounted for, and cannot excite surprise.¹

Thus there is a curious parallelism between the exposure of Sargon, King of Accad, in his basket of rushes on the Euphrates, and the similar exposure of Moses in his ark of bulrushes, upon the Nile; light is also thrown by the cuneiform inscriptions upon many names and ritual practices recorded in the Old Testament;—the observance of the sabbath, for example, was practised alike by the Hebrews and by the Chaldæans, in whose vocabulary it was explained as “a day of rest for the heart.” Both had a history of the creation, and a narrative of the deluge, as a punishment for the wickedness of mankind; both also had a story of the building of the Tower of Babel, of God’s wrath against the builders, and his consequent confounding of their counsel.

Deep interest, moreover, attaches to the “Penitential Psalms” preserved in the sacred books of Babylonia, on account of their similarity, in spirit and in form, to those contained in the Psalter of the Old Testament. Considering this remarkable coincidence between the sacred poetry of Chaldæa and of Palestine, some notice, necessarily very meagre, of the more ancient literature, may form a not unfitting prelude to a brief consideration of the inspired utterances of the Hebrew bards.

In prehistoric times, the Tigris and Euphrates valleys appear to have been occupied by Turanian settlers, known as Accadians, or “Mountaineers, from the mountainous region in the north-west, whence they probably issued.”

While enjoying a certain amount of material prosperity, this primæval population were in a state of profound spiritual darkness, their religion being a system of degrading superstition.

¹ For the following brief account of the religion and poetry of Babylonia, I am indebted to the “Hibbert Lectures” by A. H. Sayce, 1887; also to “Chaldæa,” “Story of the Nations,” by Zenaïde a Ragozin.

Their emergence from this spiritual degradation was doubtless accelerated by the immigration of the Semites, who, intermingling with the older inhabitants of the country, received from them the art of writing in a rudimentary form, together with other elements of civilization, while communicating, in return, the rudiments of a higher spiritual culture.

In the sacred books of Babylonia we are introduced to the earliest manifestation of the religious instinct in man, and can follow the religion of the Chaldæans through its successive stages of development, before and subsequently to the arrival of the Semites.

These books consist of three collections of sacred texts; one containing magic incantations and exorcisms; another hymns to the gods; and the third consisting of penitential psalms.

The magical texts, the earliest sacred literature of the Accadians, reveal a stage of religious development, wherein there was, as yet, no definite conception of God, while the moral element was entirely wanting.

Movement being identified with life, the universe was regarded as peopled by spirits innumerable, powerful for good or for evil, who were entirely beyond the ordinary control of man; to the agency of the latter, who were ever on the watch to do mischief, were attributed the various calamities to which men were subject, especially disease; one of the most dreaded of these spirits being the demon of pestilence; hence arose a body of sorcerers, or medicine-men, who claimed to know the spells and incantations by which these evil spirits could be controlled; accordingly, the main object of the magical texts is the cure and prevention of disease. Gradually, however, the superiority of the good over the evil spirits came to be recognized by the Accadians, who rose at length to the conception of creative gods, endowed with power to control and overawe supernatural beings of an inferior order; an advance which has been characterized as "the culminating point of the old Accadian religion." "Gods and spirits alike were still amenable to the spells

and exorcisms used by the sorcerer-priest, who had, however, lost much of his old character." "The very conception of a creative and beneficent deity brought with it a service of prayer and adoration." "We leave the era which witnessed the rise of the magical texts, and enter on the era of the hymns." Some of these hymns are still partly magical in character; while some are of Semitic and some of Accadian origin. There are certain ancient litanies which bear witness to the higher level of religious thought to which the later Accadians had attained. The Litany, we are told, is earlier than the age of Sargon, of Accad, who flourished B.C. 3700, and whose reign inaugurated the supremacy of the Semitic over the Accadian population.

Among the beneficent deities, worshipped by the Accadians, the most potent were Ana, the spirit of Heaven, and Ea, the spirit of Earth and god of the deep; to the latter especially they appealed for protection when in terror of the malignant demons by whom they imagined themselves surrounded. Merodach, the son of Ea, whose office it was to act as mediator between his father and suffering mankind, was another favourite object of Accadian worship. "He was originally a solar deity, the sun-god, and in this capacity is represented in the Assyrian myths and bas-reliefs, as champion of the bright powers of day, in their eternal struggle against night and storm. He is the same as the Baal of the Old Testament, and his temple at Babylon, as described by Herodotus, was regarded as one of the wonders of the world."

To Ud, another name of the sun-god, the Accadians looked up with infinite trust; to them the sun, "in all its midday glory, was a very hero of protection, the source of truth and justice, the supreme judge in heaven and on earth, who knows lie from truth, who knows the truth that is in the soul of man."

One of these Accadian hymns describes how, "at the sun's appearance in the brilliant portals of the heavens, and during his progress to their highest point, all the great gods turn to his light, all the good spirits of

heaven and earth gaze up to his face, surround him joyfully and reverently, and escort him in solemn procession."

Invocations were addressed also to other divine beings, impersonations, for the most part, if not entirely, of the great Nature-powers. This higher conception of the gods, not merely as beneficent beings, but as taking cognizance of right and wrong, as the guardians among mankind of righteous law, harmonizes with the religious convictions embodied in the Vedic hymns; a resemblance which led Lenormant to characterize the collection of Babylonian hymns as the Chaldæan Rig-Veda. These hymns, while written, for the most part, in Accadian, are nevertheless profoundly influenced by Semitic ideas. The consciousness of sin is a new feature of Chaldæan religion. Disease, and other evils incident to humanity, are no longer regarded as resulting merely from the capricious anger of malevolent spirits, but as the chastisement of the gods for impiety and sin; heartfelt contrition being considered essential to give effect to rites of purification. The following passages may serve to illustrate the connection subsisting in the Chaldæan mind between impiety and disease, as a token of divine displeasure.

"He who honours not his god is broken like a twig."

"He who has not his goddess for guardian, his flesh is ulcerated; He disappears as a star of Heaven; as the dew of evening he passes away in a moment."

The higher stage of religious development attained by the Accadians, as revealed in the later Babylonian hymns, bears witness, as we have seen, to the influence of the Semites, the gradual fusion between whom and the original inhabitants of the country became so complete as to weld them into one nation, known as the Chaldæan.

There was yet a third class of sacred Babylonian literature, namely, their Penitential Psalms, which also bear witness to the profound influence exercised by

Semitic ideas over the religious conceptions of the Accadians. To us, however, these "Lamentations of the humbled heart," as they are called, are chiefly interesting from their resemblance, in form, to the Psalms of the Old Testament, exhibiting the same parallelism of ideas and clauses, which forms so striking a feature of Hebrew poetry. They are, moreover, highly poetic, and remind us not unfrequently of passages from the Psalms and from the Prophets.

The following few lines are selected from one of the longest and one of the most important of these penitential psalms; its poetic division into regular stanzas, into strophe and ante-strophe, cannot be shown in these extracts. "As it is written in Accadian, its composition must be referred to a period anterior to the seventeenth century B.C., when that language became extinct."

"The anger of my lord's heart
May it be appeased!
The god who is wrath with me
May he be appeased!
The goddess who is wrath with me
May she be appeased!
Lord my faults are very great,
Very great my sins.
God, who knoweth what is unknown,
My faults are very great, very great my sins.
I am cast down,
And none reaches forth his hand to me.
I weep in silence,
And no man takes my hand.
I utter my prayer and none hears me.
I am enfeebled, overwhelmed,
And no man delivers me.
O Lord, thou wilt not reject thy servant!
In the midst of the tempest, come to his help,
Take his hand!
I commit sin, turn it into piety!
I commit faults,
Carry them away with the wind!
My blasphemies are great,
Rend them as a veil!
Absolve my faults!

Guide thou him who submitteth himself to thee!
 May thy heart, as the heart of a mother who has
 Brought forth, be appeased!
 As the heart of a mother who has brought forth,
 And of a father who has begotten,
 May it be appeased!"

Several other of these penitential psalms are very remarkable, not only for their symmetrical construction, but also for the depth and fervour of contrition to which they give expression.

With regard to the views respecting a future life entertained by the Chaldaeans, it appears that at the time when their earlier legendary poems were composed, "Hades was regarded by them as the gloomy realm beneath the earth, where the spirits of the dead flit about in darkness and whence they escape at times to feed on the blood of the living;" "good and bad are alike condemned to this dreary lot; a state of future rewards and punishments being still undreamed of." "Little by little, however, as the conception of the gods and their dwelling-place became spiritualized, the conception of the future condition of mankind became spiritualized also." "The doctrine of the immortality of the conscious soul began to dawn upon the Babylonian mind, together with the hope cherished by the good, to live for ever "in the land of the silver sky," the true home of the gods and of the blest. In accordance with this view is the following,

PRAYER FOR A SOUL.

"Like a bird may it fly to a lofty place;
 To the holy hands of its god may it ascend!
 The man who is departing in glory,
 May his soul shine as radiant brass!
 To that man may the sun give life!
 Grant him an abode of happiness!"

Thus, in the sacred literature bequeathed to the world by the poets and thinkers of Babylonia, as in the Vedic

hymns, we trace the gradual development of the religious idea from lower to higher conceptions of things unseen; nevertheless, we must not overlook the revolting features connected with the worship of the Babylonian deities, impersonations of the great Nature powers, of whom Baal and Istar may be regarded as the highest representatives; the latter being known in Palestine under the name of Ashtoreth. The abominations committed in her honour, in association with Baal, even within the sacred walls of Jerusalem, called forth the sternest denunciations on the part of the Hebrew Prophets.

Before bidding farewell to the poetry of Babylonia, I must allude very briefly to the great Chaldæan Epic, which, dating, it is said, from 2,000 years B.C., is the oldest known in the world.

Founded upon the mythical story of Gisdubar, or, according to the latest discovery, Gilgames, the solar hero of Chaldæa, it is divided into twelve books, corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac, and is, in fact, the story of the sun's progress through the year, embodying in poetry of a high order, the wonderfully varied pageantry of Nature, by which it is accompanied. What invests this poem with peculiar interest is the account of the deluge, contained in the eleventh book, answering to the eleventh month, "the month of the curse of rain," with the sign of the waterman. This account coincides, in so many minute particulars, with that given in the book of Genesis, as to point, incontrovertibly, to a common origin.

Nevertheless, the differences between the two narratives are as striking as their coincidences; "that of Genesis being severely monotheistic, while in that of Chaldæa, the varied phenomena of Nature, Heaven, Sun, Storm, Sea and Rain, personified and deified, act their parts in the great Cataclysm, while Nature herself, as the great mother of beings, and fosterer of life, is represented in the person of Istar, lamenting the slaughter of men."

Another Chaldæan Epic embodies the legend of Istar's Descent into Hades, "a thinly-veiled description of the earth-goddess seeking below for the hidden waters of life, which shall cause the sun-god, and all nature with him, to rise again from the sleep of death."

Peculiar interest attaches to these two Chaldæan Epics, as being the earliest poetic embodiments of the great Solar and Chthonian nature-myths, which underlie many of the ancient religions of the world.

PALESTINE.

THE PSALTER.

STRIKING indeed is the contrast between the divinities of Olympos, assembled under the sovereignty of Zeus, invested with the blended attributes of nature and of humanity, the progeny of an elder race, and destined themselves to pass away, and Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, as conceived by their later prophets and psalmists,—a Being without beginning and without end, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, formless and invisible, yet, at the same time, the shepherd of his people, their guide, and sympathizing friend.

“For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. lvii. 15).

This and other points of divergence between the genius of Hellas and Palestine, will appear from a brief consideration of the poets and poetry of the Hebrews.¹

From their historical books we learn what a prominent place song, with instrumental music, occupied alike in the domestic and the national life of the Hebrews; all the varied emotions, joyous or grievous, awakened by the vicissitudes of life,—the exultation of victory and the

¹ I wish to express my obligation to the following works, “La Psautier,” par Edourd Reuss, Delitzsch’s “Commentary on the Psalms,” “The Bampton Lectures,” by the Rev. T. K. Cheyne, M.A., D.D.

agony of defeat, the joy of the bridegroom, and the mourner's wail, all embodied themselves in song, which was the constant accompaniment, not only of their religious ceremonials, but also of the rural festivities with which they celebrated the harvest, the vintage, and the sheep-shearing.

Of this treasure of national poetry the greatest portion has disappeared; happily the religious lyrics of the Hebrews have survived in the Psalter, the contents of which, from their originality, from the grandeur of the truths which they embody, and the depth and fervour of the emotions to which they give expression, together with their rich variety of musical tone, are unsurpassed in the literature of the world.

One striking characteristic of the Hebrew poets, distinguishing them from those of Hellas, is their intense subjectivity; accordingly, while giving lyrical expression to their emotions and aspirations, personal and national, they have produced no *Épos*, and with one exception, no drama; this phenomenon is the more remarkable because their national history abounds in episodes and traditions admirably adapted to imaginative treatment. The Book of Job, it is true, may justly be characterized as a dramatic poem; as an artistic master-work, however, it occupies an exceptional and unique position in Hebrew literature. The object to which the author addressed himself was the attempted solution of the problem, sorely trying to the devout Hebrew, the reconciliation, namely, of the sufferings of the righteous with the justice of an omnipotent and all-seeing God; a problem which underlies also many of the psalms.

While profoundly impressed by the mystery, impenetrable to mortal ken, which shrouds the working of Omnipotence, alike in the external universe, and in the affairs of men, the poet clings, with unswerving conviction, to the spiritual relation subsisting between himself and Jehovah, a conviction which finds expression in the passionate cry, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

The Psalter, though, in its present form, apparently a single book, is in fact a pentateuch, consisting of five smaller collections, made at different times, by different editors, and distinguished by special characteristics. Doxologies, evidently intended to mark the termination of the first four books, have become incorporated with their concluding psalms, namely the 41st, the 72nd, the 89th, and the 106th ; while the fifth book embraces the remaining forty-three psalms, from the 107th to the 150th psalm.

The independent character of the first and second books appears from the fact that, in the first book, the name Jehovah is, with very few exceptions, applied to God, while in the second He is characterized by the more abstract title Elohim. This circumstance is the more remarkable because, in the two psalms common to both books—the 14th and the second half of the 40th psalm being identical with the 53rd and the 70th, the same difference in the appellation of the Deity is observed.

The fifth book includes several smaller collections, among which special interest attaches to the Hallel cycle, (113 to 118), and to the songs of degrees (120 to 134); the former, commemorating two memorable epochs in the national history, were sung at the three great feasts, at the new moons, and at the feast of dedication ; while the latter are, with great probability, regarded as having been sung by the pilgrims en route for Jerusalem, on occasion of the great national festivals.

With regard to the authorship of the psalms and the epoch to which they may be referred, no reliance can be placed on the superscriptions which, representing various ancient traditions, were introduced at a comparatively late period, by the Doctors of the Synagogue, by whom, with the exception of the forty-six anonymous psalms, together with the psalm attributed to Moses, the entire Psalter is ascribed to David and his contemporaries.

It is, however, very generally recognized by modern scholars, that a comparatively small number, if any, of the psalms are due to the royal bard ; thirteen are regarded by

Ewald as bearing, unmistakably, the impress of his genius, while the latest commentator considers that "insuperable difficulties attend the supposition that we have any Davidic psalms."¹

Books four and five, which finally closed the Psalter, received their present form soon after B.C. 142. The compilation of this minor psalter was doubtless connected with the temple celebrations, commemorating the Maccabæan triumph over Antiochus Epiphanes, who had attempted to substitute Zeus in place of Jehovah, as the God of the Jews. "It is, therefore, not surprising, that Maccabæan psalm-literature should be represented in it." Of this literature we have a splendid example in psalm 118, which has been referred with great probability to the first victories of the Maccabees, culminating in the purification and reconsecration of the Temple by Judas the Maccabee, B.C. 165. "Israel has emerged triumphant from a desperate conflict"; "Jehovah has interposed, he has put down the idol-gods and their worshippers; friendless Israel has proved too strong for the whole world in arms"; this psalm, commemorating the unhoped-for victory, was intended to be sung antiphonally by worshippers and Levites. It has been suggested that verse 27, "Jehovah (not Zeus), is God; light hath he given us," may allude to the illumination which gave rise to the second name of the Dedication Festival (the Lights), a name which Josephus regards as a symbol of unexpected deliverance."² Additional interest attaches to another remarkable group of psalms, (93 and 95-100), when regarded as giving expression to the national enthusiasm on the completion of the second Temple, B.C. 516, which, as the visible symbol of Jehovah's presence, seemed once more to bring Israel's theocratic king into direct communication with his people. These seven psalms have been characterized as "a heptad of

¹ "The Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter." Thomas Kelly Cheyne, M.A., D.D.

² *Ibid.*

new songs," and certainly as the outpouring of unbounded joy, tempered by the profoundest reverence, they are unsurpassed even in the Psalter.

A few fine lyrics, not included in the Psalter, occur in the other books of the Old Testament; such, for example, are the so-called song of Moses (Exod. xv. 1-18), and the song of Deborah (Jud. v.), two splendid odes, commemorating decisive deliverances in the national history. The first celebrates the passage of the Red Sea, when, in a single night, the Hebrews, from a tribe of slaves, became a free people, an event so supremely significant that it has coloured their religious imagery down to the latest period of their history; while their confidence in Jehovah, as their supernatural Deliverer, "Glorious in holiness, fearful in praise, doing wonders," became the grand overruling conviction which characterized the Hebrew nation.

The song of Deborah, which bears the unmistakable stamp of antiquity, and which by some scholars is regarded as the most ancient Hebrew poem which in its complete form has come down to us, commemorates another momentous event in the history of Israel, second only in significance to the passage of the Red Sea.

With these noble poems must be associated the magnificent psalm, characterized by Ewald as "Habakkuk's Pindaric Ode" (Hab. iii.), the lyrical interpretation of the entire prophecy.¹

After recalling the triumph of Jehovah in the past, the poet, in conclusion, gives emphatic expression to his unswerving trust in Israel's God. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." (Hab. iii. 17-18.)

The thanksgiving psalm of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii.

¹ "Dict. of the Bible." Habakkuk.

10-20) on his recovery from a dangerous illness, is another beautiful lyric not included in the Psalter.

Such also is David's touching lament over Saul and Jonathan his son (2 Sam. i. 17, 27), the authenticity of which has never been questioned. In this exquisite elegy David gives expression not only to his personal grief at the death of his friend, but also to his dismay that so terrible a calamity should have befallen the rulers of Israel; "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!"

Even should his claim to the authorship of the psalms be disallowed, this poem alone would suffice to establish David's reputation as "the sweet singer of Israel," while as a musician we know, on the testimony of Amos (vi. 5), that his fame survived two centuries after his death.

Additional interest attaches to the Psalter when viewed as in part giving expression to the sentiments and emotions of the Hebrew nation, and in part, though more rarely, as the utterance of the individual psalmists. In accordance with this view, it is satisfactory to recognize that, in psalms breathing the most deadly vengeance (Ps. 69, 109), the poet must be regarded as speaking, not in his own name, but in that of the whole people; two nations, one the oppressor and the other the oppressed, one the tyrant and the other the victim, are here brought face to face; nor can we be surprised that, in a comparatively barbarous age, the despair of the latter should have found vent in the terrible imprecations and maledictions, which give a painful shock to our Christian sentiment. Among the psalms attributed by Ewald to David, and assigned by other scholars to a later period, particular interest attaches to the two grand nature-psalms, the 29th and the 19th (1-7), as revealing a characteristic of the Hebrew poets foreign to those of Hellas and of Rome;—the sense, namely, of awe, of wonder, and of rapturous delight, with which they contemplated the phenomena of Nature, as direct manifestations of the Deity.

What can be grander than the 29th psalm, the psalm of the seven thunders, as it has been styled, where the tempest, "the voice of Jehovah" is represented as crashing with resistless fury over the earth, uprooting the gigantic cedars, causing the mountains to tremble, and lighting up the darkness with flames of fire. Very striking is the contrast between the awful turmoil raging upon earth, and the vision of the majestic Being enthroned above the storm, whose glory is celebrated by the angelic host; "Jehovah will give strength unto his people; Jehovah will bless his people with peace."

In Psalm xix. 1-7, the glory of God is proclaimed, not by the resistless fury of the tempest, but by the calm beauty of the supernal sphere.

"The heavens declare the glory of God,
And the firmament showeth his handy-work."

This psalm strikingly illustrates the tendency of the Hebrew poets to personify the varied phenomena of nature; thus Day and Night are here represented as endowed with intelligence, and as proclaiming without intermission the glorious tidings published by the heavens.

It is now generally recognized by scholars that, with this grand nature-psalm (1-7) a conclusion, having reference to the moral law, has, at a subsequent period, been associated.

Very noble also are Psalms 103 and 104, belonging to the post-exile period, and together forming one magnificent hymn.

In the first part (103) God's praise is founded upon His loving-kindness and fatherly affection, as experienced by the psalmist, in the depths of his own soul, and as revealed in his dealings with his people; while the second part (104), based upon the account of the creation in the first chapter of Genesis, extols the creative power and mercy of Jehovah, as displayed throughout the wide realm of nature.

Of this grand ode Alexander von Humboldt writes as

follows:—"It might almost be said that one single psalm represents the image of the Cosmos." . . . "We are astonished to find, in a lyrical poem of such limited compass, the whole universe, the heavens and the earth, sketched with a few bold touches."

Very striking is the difference between the Hellenes and the Hebrews in their respective presentations of Nature; by the former her varied objects were represented as distinct human personalities, invested with typical forms, peopling the heavens and the earth with a multitude of imaginary beings, the deified impersonations of natural phenomena; thus, instead of gazing face to face upon the varied aspects of the universe, the Hellenes saw only an assemblage of graceful forms, the creations of their own imagination. The Hebrews, on the contrary, without such embodiment, breathed into inanimate objects the breath of life, attributing to them thoughts and emotions, together with appropriate media of expression; thus, in their poems, "the mountains break forth into singing;" "the floods clap their hands;" and "the little hills rejoice on every side."

By far the most characteristic feature of the Hebrew psalmists, by which they are severed immeasurably from the poets of classical antiquity, was their recognition of the close and intimate relation subsisting between the spirit of God and the spirit of man, a relation of sympathy and of spiritual communion.

In accordance with their view, man, having been created in the image of God, was capable of knowing Him, and of holding direct communion with Him. Accordingly, in the psalms, we have the outpouring of human affection, under every variety of mood, to One who, though unseen, was felt to be a never-failing Comforter and Friend. "When thou saidest, seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, thy face, Lord, will I seek. (Ps. xxvii.) "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." (Ps. xlii.).

Recognizing that this inward communion with God

had no connection with external forms, and having risen to the grand conception that obedience and thanksgiving constitute the true divine service, these Hebrew poets, like the prophets, taught the futility of sacrifices and of all ceremonial observances (Ps. xl. 6-9; l. 8-15). They taught also that the estrangements from Jehovah, caused by sin, could only be removed by contrition, and by self-surrender to the divine will (Ps. xxxii. 1-7). Deeply conscious, moreover, of the imperfection of their own obedience, they give utterance, in penitential psalms, to their profound sense of humiliation, while, at the same time, celebrating the loving-kindness and tender mercies of Jehovah, without which prayer would be unavailing.

The noble psalms embodying these more elevated views doubtless represent the more spiritualized section of the community, the true Israel, whose function it was, not only to spread the knowledge of Jehovah to other nations, and to raise their less advanced brethren to a higher level, but also to prepare the way for Christianity.

"The devout musings and anticipations of the noblest Israelites embodied in the psalms must have helped to produce the spiritual atmosphere in which alone the Messiah could draw his breath. The Scriptures, and not least the Psalter, must have contributed to form His chosen one for the Christ, and the Christ for His chosen."¹

Time would, however, fail, were I to dwell in detail upon the various phases of the inner life, as known to the Hebrews, which we find reflected in the Psalter; intense sympathy with nature; unswerving faith in spiritual realities; unshaken confidence in the compassion and loving-kindness of Jehovah; burning zeal for his glory; agony of remorse when, overwhelmed with shame, the poet cries out of the depths, together with ecstatic joy in the sense of forgiveness; these are only a

¹ "The Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter." Thomas Kelly Cheyne, M.A., D.D.

few of the diversified experiences which find vivid and musical expression in the Psalms. Hence it is that these poems have in a special manner been taken to the heart of humanity, and from age to age, appealing to the deepest feelings of human nature, they have been resorted to, as an exhaustless fountain of comfort, of inspiration, and of inward strength.

Before concluding this inadequate notice of the Psalter, I would call attention to Ps. cxxxix., one of the sublimest, as it is one of the latest, poems in the collection, being written in the idiom of the post exilic period. Nothing can exceed the grandeur of the poetry with which the psalmist, in the earlier divisions of the poem, celebrates the omniscience, and the omnipresence of Jehovah; "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?

"If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy right hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Thus the thought of God's continual presence is to the psalmist a source of unfailing confidence and joy.

From the lofty elevation of sentiment to which we have been raised by the author of this sublime ode, we experience a painful descent on reading the concluding stanza, wherein he gives expression to the bitter hate wherewith he regards the enemies of Jehovah. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies."

We are reminded of many similar passages throughout the Psalter, all of which bear witness to the fierceness of the struggle wherewith the Hebrews maintained their superiority over their Canaanite foes, upon which their very existence as a nation, and the consequent worship of Jehovah, depended. They bear witness also to the closeness of the bond which united the Hebrews to their

national God, whom they regarded under the twofold aspect of Father and of King. Accordingly, the association of Baal and other foreign deities with the worship of Jehovah was denounced, by the pious Hebrew, as the direst disloyalty and treason, and against those who practised this semi-heathen worship he hurled his bitterest anathemas. So long as Jehovah was regarded merely as the tribal God of the Hebrews, one among a multitude of hostile deities, and whose supremacy could only be vindicated at the cost of continuous effort on the part of his worshippers, this feeling of personal antagonism, of bitter hatred against his enemies, was inevitable. Gradually, however, with the recognition that Jehovah was not only the God of Israel, but of all nations, this hostile attitude towards non-Israelites gave place to more kindly sentiments, a result which has left its impress upon the Psalter, and of which Ps. lxxxvii. offers a striking example.

Numerous psalms may be adduced as illustrating the joyful exultation inspired by this recognition of Jehovah's extended sovereignty (Ps. lxvii. 4; xcvii. 1; xcvi. 8-9), accompanied as it was by the conviction that to establish in the world the kingdom of God was Israel's appointed missionary work.

"Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people."

"Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth" (Ps. xcvi. 3-10). Such quotations might be largely multiplied.

It is, however, in the writings of the prophets, which will now come under our consideration, that we must look for that enlarged catholicity of sentiment, consequent upon the expansion of the divine idea, which constituted Israel's special qualification for his high function as the precursor of Christianity.

Note.—Psalms having reference to death, and to life beyond the grave, will be considered in another connection.

THE PROPHETS.

WHILE the Hebrew psalmists were giving lyrical expression to their religious emotions, individual and national, the Hebrew prophets, from age to age, were developing their conception of Jehovah, as a righteous God. It is this conception which, lying at the root of the Hebrew religion, constitutes one of the most fundamental distinctions between Hebraism and Hellenism.

From the earliest times, when Jehovah was regarded by the Hebrews as their tribal God, the Leader of their armies, He was revered also as the God of Justice and of Law, to whom appeal was made in questions of right and wrong (Exod. xviii. 19). Nevertheless, notwithstanding the higher moral character thus attributed by the Hebrews to their national deity, their religious system, with its external observances, bore in many respects so striking a resemblance to that of the other Semitic tribes by whom they were surrounded, that, for many centuries after their settlement in Canaan, they manifested a constant tendency to a twofold idolatry; the desecration of the national religion by the worship of idolatrous symbols, and the association with Jehovah of Baal, the god of the country, and other local divinities. Of this we have a striking example in the conduct of Ahab, who, eager for political purposes to strengthen his alliance with Tyre, while continuing himself his idolatrous worship of Jehovah, did not hesitate to gratify his Tyrian queen by endowing a temple to Baal.

To counteract this tendency was the prime object of the Hebrew prophets, an order of men unique in history, belonging to the most varied social positions, who, believing themselves to be the media of a divine communication, and giving expression to their thoughts as interpreters of the divine will, not unfrequently in rhythmical language, must, in the highest sense of the

word, and without derogating from their sacred calling, be ranked among the world's great poets.

Grand indeed was the function exercised by these mighty men of old, who, with unswerving fidelity to their high calling, succeeded in keeping alive in the hearts of their countrymen those fundamental truths and principles of religion upon which Christianity is based. While inveighing against idolatry, interwoven, as it was, with the symbolic and corrupt nature-worship of the Canaanites, and which, while rampant in Northern Israel, was largely current also in Judah, the Hebrew prophets, seizing the great fundamental principle of Hebraism, never ceased to proclaim Jehovah as a righteous God, and obedience to the moral law as the only sound basis of the national life.

Thus Amos, about 700 B.C., a great poet as well as a great man, was one of the first to proclaim that the bond between Jehovah and his people depended, not upon the solemn services of religion, but upon their observance of the moral law. During the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II., the Northern Israelites, though threatened by the advance of the Assyrian Power, placing absolute reliance upon the protection of their national deity, were blind to the impending danger. While steeped in moral corruption, they thought by a multiplication of sacrifices and oblations, and by assiduous observance of ceremonial worship, to secure the favour of Jehovah. To these deluded worshippers, assembled in the royal sanctuary of Bethel, the shepherd of Tekoa, speaking in the name of the Lord, delivered his prophetic message, "I hate, I despise your feast days ;—Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them : Take away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."¹ (Amos v. 21, 24.)

Hosea, the immediate successor of Amos, while de-

¹ See "The Prophets of Israel and their place in History," by Dr. Robertson Smith. Also "The Book of Isaiah," by George Adam Smith, to both of which I beg to express my obligation.

ploring with bitter anguish of heart Israel's rebellion against Jehovah, and proclaiming the horrors of their impending doom, gives at the same time pathetic expression to Jehovah's never-failing love for his rebellious children, which he symbolizes under the tenderest of human relationships, that of the husband to his spouse, and of the father to his child. It is this conception of the personal bond subsisting between Jehovah and Israel, the bond of fidelity and love, which distinguishes the poet-seer of Samaria from the shepherd of Tekoa.

Among the grand figures of the Old Testament, there are few, if any, grander than the prophet Isaiah, through whom, entering on his career in early manhood, 740 B.C., and filling the prophetic office for upwards of forty years, "the word of prophecy, before rejected and despised, became a practical power in the state."

Grand indeed are the utterances of this mighty Hebrew bard, many of which sound across the ages like a majestic organ-peal. Nevertheless, for their full appreciation, more perhaps than the words of any other poet, they require to be studied in connection with the political events of the period, a subject the difficulty of which is enhanced by the absence of any strict chronological order in the arrangement of his prophecies, and which is quite too large for consideration on the present occasion. I must therefore content myself with indicating very briefly a few characteristics of Isaiah's teaching, observing that, while in some directions he carried on the work of his predecessors, in others he rose to a higher level of spiritual thought than had been previously attained. Like Amos and Hosea, he proclaimed with emphatic power the supremacy of the moral law over all ceremonial observances (Isa. i. 11-17), a lesson enforced also by his contemporary, Micah (vi. 6, 8).

Very grand is the vision by which Isaiah's prophetic ministry was inaugurated, and which foreshadows those fundamental truths of religion which form the burden of his teaching; namely, the universal sovereignty of Jehovah, and the futility of ceremonial observances. (Isa. vi.)

Not content with simply proclaiming these great principles, he sought to give them practical effect by gathering around him a band of disciples, who, in accordance with his vision, were taught by him to dissociate the fundamental truths of religion from the ritual observances of the Temple. He thus inaugurated "the true Israel within Israel, a centre round which the nation could rally" and who were prepared, during the Captivity, to resist the heathen influences, to which, under similar circumstances, notwithstanding the burning words of Amos and Hosea, the tribes of Northern Israel had hopelessly succumbed.

Possessed by the sublime idea of Jehovah's universal sovereignty, he beheld, in prophetic vision, all nations acknowledging His authority, and yielding submission to His sway. Deeply interesting is the changed attitude of the prophet towards surrounding nations, which followed this expansion of the divine idea.

So long as Jehovah was regarded merely as supreme among many gods, the worshippers of these inferior deities, the rivals, as it were, of Jehovah, were, to the pious Israelite, objects of intense abhorrence; a sentiment which finds emphatic expression in many of the psalms.

Among the nations who were the objects of Israel's direst hate were the Egyptians and the Assyrians; nevertheless, no sooner had Isaiah realized the great truth that Jehovah is the God of the whole earth, than he recognized that his blessing could not be confined to Israel alone, but must embrace all nations, even Egypt and Assyria. Accordingly he speaks of the time when "The Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day.

"In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land;

"Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of mine hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isa. xix. 21, 24-25).

Very grand is the prophetic vision of universal peace,

resulting from the recognition of God's universal sovereignty, as set forth alike by Isaiah and Micah. "And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. ii. 4; Mic. iv. 3).

Another figure of surpassing interest among the prophets of Judah is the seer of Anathoth, Jeremiah, whose utterances are, however, so closely interwoven with the history and politics of the period, that to give any connected account of them here would be impossible. Carrying on the great work of his predecessors, he, like Isaiah, declares most emphatically, that sacrificial worship forms no inherent part of Hebraism. "For I spake not unto your fathers nor commanded them, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice and I will be your God and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you" (Jer. vii. 22, 23).

His eye, piercing beneath the surface, saw the inward corruption which, in spite of the outward reform accomplished by Josiah, pervaded the heart of the nation, and which would inevitably issue in destruction. Accordingly, braving the malice of princes and of priests, exasperated against him by his fearless denunciation of their violence and oppression, and braving also the hatred of his countrymen, he ceased not to proclaim the doom impending over Jerusalem, and from which there could be no escape. More clearly, however, than any of his predecessors, he recognized that the bond between Jehovah and His people was inward and spiritual, a bond of love on His part, and of service upon theirs, and accordingly, that when through the discipline of suffering they had been taught the blessing of obedience, a remnant would return from captivity; "Fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith Jehovah; neither be dis-

mayed, O Israel; for lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity" (Jer. xxx. 10).

They would thus be prepared for a more spiritual covenant, having relation not to men's outward acts, but to the sentiments and emotions of which those acts are the expression.

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest" (Jer. xxxi. 33, 34).

All the prophets, from Amos to Jeremiah, recognizing that it was their high mission to vindicate the divine justice, never ceased, while denouncing the idolatry of their countrymen, to warn them of their impending doom. At length the long threatened retribution came. In the year 588, a hundred and thirty-four years subsequent to the fall of the kingdom of Israel, Jerusalem, after an obstinate siege of eighteen months, was taken by the Chaldeans, the Temple was burnt to the ground, and the inhabitants, in large numbers, were transported to Babylon. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people!"

Thus with the destruction of the Temple which, with its daily sacrifices and ritual observances, had become in the mind of the Jews almost indissolubly associated with the worship of Jehovah, they were prepared to recognize the fundamental principle of all true religion, which, at a subsequent period, was so emphatically proclaimed by the great teacher, that "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

During the earlier years of the Captivity, the most conspicuous figure is the prophet Ezekiel, who, transported to Babylon with King Jehoiachin, B.C. 598, was established with a colony of fellow-exiles on the banks of the Chebar.

From that distant outpost, gazing across the desert, he foresaw the terrible doom impending over Jerusalem,

and in burning words and symbolic acts, he gave expression to the agony of soul with which he beheld the coming desolation.

Deep interest attaches to the writing of Ezekiel, as bearing witness to his familiarity with the imagery of the Assyrian monuments, where the human form and the human countenance are associated with strange winged creatures, birds and beasts, while the vast complexity of the prophet's vision, "wheel within wheel," would seem to correspond to the new order of a larger, wider, deeper Providence now opening before him." The doctrine of a more spiritual covenant—of the law written in the heart—briefly indicated in the writings of Jeremiah, a doctrine involving the responsibility of each individual soul, was proclaimed by Ezekiel with a depth and fervour of conviction which mark him out as peculiarly the herald of the new dispensation (Ezek. xviii. 19, 32). This conception of God's unconditional justice, as manifested alike in his dealings with nations and individuals was the characteristic of Ezekiel's teaching; in accordance with it, he encouraged the penitent portion of Israel to hope for their return, and in his wonderful vision of the valley of dry bones, he shadowed forth the time when "the grave of their captivity should be opened, when the skeleton of Judaism should come out of its tomb, and be inspired by the invigorating blast of the divine Spirit, and be clothed with fresh and living beauty."

This hope was also fostered by the anonymous prophet known as the second Isaiah, who belonged to the later, as Ezekiel had belonged to the earlier period of the Captivity. Surrounded by the splendid idolatry of the Babylonians, with withering scorn he contrasts their idols, the work of men's hands, with Jehovah, "the everlasting God," "the Creator of the ends of the earth," whose sovereignty, alike in the domain of Nature and of history, is universal and absolute; carrying on the work of his predecessors, he proclaimed the worthlessness of ritual observances, and enforced the supremacy of the moral law. (Isa. lv. lviii.)

Firmly believing in the return from captivity of a loyal remnant, and in the ultimate triumph of Jehovah, this magnificent poet gives expression to his rapturous joy in strains which, for sublimity and pathos, have never been surpassed.

How grand is the following outburst, and how exquisitely beautiful is the image wherewith the Hebrew bard shadows forth the long-suffering love of Jehovah for his people !

“Sing, oh heavens, and be joyful, oh earth, and break forth into singing, oh mountains ; for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.

“But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.

“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? Yea, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” (Isa. xlix. 13, 15.)

In the same strain of lofty enthusiasm are the following verses :

“Sing, oh ye heavens, for the Lord hath done *it* ; shout ye lower parts of the earth ; break forth into singing, ye mountains, oh forest and every tree therein ; for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob and glorified himself in Israel.” (Isa. xliv. 23.)

Like his brother prophets, the second Isaiah beheld, in prophetic vision, the final establishment of God’s kingdom upon earth, when all nations should recognize the authority of the Most High, and yield submission to His sway. In his mind, however, this conviction was accompanied by an intense belief in the supremacy of Israel, and in the subordination of the Gentiles.

“Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations ; spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes ; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left ; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.” (Isa. liv. 2, 3.)

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, and the Gentiles shall come

to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." (Isa. lx. 1, 3.)

The recognition of Jehovah as king, not only over Israel but over all nations, thus proclaimed by the prophets, finds expression also, as we have already seen, in the Psalter. (Psalms lxxxvii., cxiii., cxiv.)

Recognizing in Cyrus an instrument of Jehovah for the deliverance of his people, the Hebrew prophet hailed the Persian king as the anointed of the Lord, "Whose right hand I have holden," saith the Lord, "to subdue nations before him." "I am the Lord and there is none beside me; I girded thee though thou hast not known me; that they may know from the rising of the sun and from the West, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord, and there is none else.

"I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." (Isa. xlv. 1, 5, 7.)

These words, addressed by the Hebrew prophet to Cyrus, the Persian king, are invested with deep interest when viewed as a protest on the part of the former against Zoroastrian dualism, the religion of Ormuzd and Ahriman.

It is interesting to learn from the Cyrus-cylinder brought from Babylonia, that Merodach, the supreme Babylonian god, is there represented as having chosen Cyrus, and destined him by name for the sovereignty of Chaldæa. "Merodach, the great lord, the restorer of his people, beheld with joy the deeds of his vicegerent, who was righteous in hand and heart. To his city of Babylon he summoned his march, and he bade him take the road to Babylon; like a friend and a comrade he went at his side."¹

It is, however, as the evangelical prophet that the second Isaiah has taken the deepest hold upon the heart of Christendom; upon the history of the Messianic idea, its origin and development, I must not dwell at any length. Suffice it to say that it was based upon certain

¹ "The Hibbert Lectures." A. H. Sayce.

convictions which lay at the root of Judaism; the conviction more especially that Israel was the chosen people, commissioned to spread to all nations the knowledge of Jehovah, and to establish his sovereignty; a conviction which finds emphatic expression in the verses common to Isaiah and to Micah (Isa. ii. 3; Mic. iv. 2), and which, it has been suggested, may probably have been quoted from some earlier prophet. Associated with this conviction was the belief that the national king, the visible representative of Jehovah, whose office had been declared hereditary in the house of David, was the divinely-appointed agent for the accomplishment of this great work.

This belief, when, during the reigns of wicked and idolatrous kings, contradicted by reality, found fulfilment in the anticipated reign of an ideal king, a scion of the house of David, whose promised advent, proclaimed by a series of prophets, sustained the people in seasons of national tribulation, and whose functions varied with the circumstances of the age.

At one time, the subjugation and annihilation of the heathen was regarded as the special work of the imaginary Davidic king. Thus in Psalm ii. his mission, as there stated, is "to break the heathen with a rod of iron.

"Thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."

In Psalm xxi., it is said of the enemies of the king, that "Jehovah shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall consume them." Such delineations of the Davidic king, as the minister of divine vengeance, might be largely multiplied. Gradually, however, in accordance with the higher conception of Jehovah, as set forth by the later psalmists and prophets, corresponding elevation and expansion were attributed by them to the character and functions of the ideal king, as his vicegerent and representative.

Very striking is the picture given by the prophet Zechariah of the promised king's peaceful entrance into Jerusalem, "who shall speak peace unto the heathen, and his dominion shall be from sea even unto sea, and

from the river even unto the ends of the earth" (Zech. ix. 9, 10). It is, however, in the prophecies of Isaiah that, during the pre-exilic period, the conception of the Davidic king, as holding the most intimate relations with Jehovah, and as his visible image and representative, finds the highest expression. "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6), language which, however exalted, must be regarded as, in the bold imagery of the East, having reference to a human and not to a divine personality.

Jeremiah also looked forward to the reign of a Davidic king, "who should execute judgment and justice on the earth" (Jer. xxiii.). In a similar strain Ezekiel represents Jehovah as promising to save his people: "And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it" (Ezek. xxxiv. 33).

The conversion of the heathen having from of old been regarded as the appointed mission of the Hebrew people, they are represented by the prophets, not unfrequently, as addressed collectively by Jehovah as, "My Servant," the instrument, that is, for the accomplishment of my purposes. (Jer. xxx. 10; Ezek. xxxvii. 25.)

Gradually, however, it had become apparent that, so long as the nation remained in Judæa, far from converting the heathen, they were themselves becoming more and more deeply contaminated with heathenism, with its attendant moral corruption and national enervation. This descent was arrested by the Babylonian Captivity; and it was through the humiliation consequent upon that terrible calamity, that Israel, chastised and purified, was at length prepared for his lofty mission, as the Revealer of God to all nations. The Messianic conceptions of the Hebrews were completely revolutionized by this overwhelming national calamity. For a royal personage, a Davidic king, as the promised Messiah, the great prophet of the Captivity substitutes "the suffering servant of Jehovah."

In describing the restoration from exile, the second Isaiah at first, like his predecessors, represents Jehovah as applying the title "my servant," to the whole Hebrew nation. (Isa. xlv. 1; xlviii. 20.) Gradually, however, the title was limited to the loyal remnant who, having escaped contamination from the surrounding idolatry, were fit agents for accomplishing the purposes of Jehovah. "I will set thee for a light of the nations, to be my salvation to the end of the earth" (Isa. xlix. 6).

Finally, the functions and qualities of "the Servant of Jehovah," are concentrated in a single individual, who was appointed to bring forth judgment to the Gentiles, and who is thus pictured by the grand prophet-bard of the Captivity: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench; he shall bring forth judgment unto truth" (Isa. xlii. 1, 3).

Inexpressibly important are the truths involved in this substitution, as the promised Messiah, of the suffering servant, for the Davidic king; namely, that absolute self-surrender to the divine will, on the part alike of nations and individuals, is the essential condition of establishing on earth the Kingdom of Heaven, and that all antagonistic influences must be overcome, not through the agency of force, but by persuasion, by loving sympathy and by the slow process of spiritual development.

On bidding farewell to the second Isaiah and his brother prophets, I would call attention to the wonderful hopefulness, which, under circumstances the most adverse and depressing, they never failed to exhibit. Relying, with unswerving conviction, upon the government of a righteous God, they denounced with dauntless courage and unflagging zeal, everything antagonistic to his holy will. Their faith in the progress of humanity, based upon their belief in the living God, imparts to their writings their soul-animating power, which, after the lapse of more than two thousand years, and in spite of apparent failure and retrogression, awakens in the mind of their readers the same lofty confidence in the ultimate triumph of the True and of the Right. It is

thus that, in the all-important spheres of religion and morality, the progress of humanity is so strikingly illustrated by the psalmists and prophets of Israel.¹

From their tendency to idolatry the Hebrews were finally delivered by the Babylonian Captivity, a period which has left an indelible mark upon their religion. Recognizing that the terrible calamity which had befallen them was due to their infidelity to Jehovah, in their tribulation they turned to Him with their whole heart, and never again swerved from their allegiance. In addition to their return to Monotheism, due to their period of exile, the religious conceptions of the Hebrews, in other directions, were profoundly modified by their contact with Persian Mazdeism.

Thus, previous to the Captivity, they appear to have had a vague conception of angels, as beings of a nature superior to that of man, and as messengers of the Most High; in their later books, mention is made of the angelic host, the leaders of which enjoy the privilege of being admitted into the immediate presence of the supreme deity, and who bear distinctive appellations; the first three being Gabriel, Michael, and Raphael; the three others are Uriel, Jeremiel, and Tealthus.

This change may be confidently attributed to the fusion of the Hebrew conception of angelic nature, with the more developed system of the Zendavesta. The demonology of the Hebrews was also modified by their contact with Mazdeism. Though traces of demoniacal agency may be found in the books of the Old Testament, the conception of Satan, as the Prince of Darkness, with his host of Evil Spirits, warring against the Most High, is essentially the product of Zoroastrian dualism. It is interesting thus to trace back to the Iranian branch of our Aryan progenitors, the angelic beings who form so grand a feature in the "*Divina Commedia*" of Dante, and to refer to the same source, Milton's magnificent creations, angelic and demoniacal—his Gabriel, Michael,

See "*The History of the Jewish Church*," by A. B. Stanley.

Raphael, Uriel, and Satan, one of the sublimest conceptions of poetic genius.

By far the most important influence exerted by Mazdeism over Judaism was, however, in connection with the belief in the life beyond the grave, associated with the idea of a future judgment.

That human existence terminated with the grave, was doubtless the dreary belief of the earlier Hebraism; a belief which finds lyrical expression not only in many of the psalms (vi. 5, 6; xxx. 9; lxxxviii. 11, 3; cxv. 17), but also in the thanksgiving psalm attributed to Hezekiah (Isa. xxxvii. 18). Nevertheless, the story of Enoch's translation (Gen. v. 22), and that of Elijah in 2 Kings, 11, may have tended to awaken in some minds a vague surmise as to the possibility of continued existence beyond the grave, while the experience of Jehovah's loving-kindness, together with the sense of communion with Him, as constituting the only true life, that of the soul, may have led some, among the more spiritually-minded Israelites to think of death, not as the final close of existence, but as a sleep, on awaking from which they would find themselves in God's more immediate presence; an anticipation embodied in several beautiful psalms (xvi. 10, 11; xvii. 15; xlix. 15; lxxiii. 24, 25).

It has been suggested that these germs, so to speak, of belief in a life beyond the grave, present in the Hebrew mind, and associated with a vague idea of retribution, may have been fostered by coming in contact, during the Persian period of the Captivity, with the more developed form of the same doctrines in the religion of Ahura Mazda, "which opened immortality to the poor as well as to the rich, on the sole condition of their fighting manfully against evil and the evil one."

In Mazdeism, "immortality to the righteous meant not merely deathlessness, but complete happiness of body and soul, begun in this life and continued in an exalted degree in the world to come;" "while the wicked were cast into darkness begotten of darkness;" "to that

world, to the dismal realm, you are delivered by your own doings, by your own conscience, O Sinners."

The first judgment, which was in a sense private, was to be followed by a second judgment which was to be public and general. "No longer then would there be a separation between heaven and earth. The sun would for ever shine, and the faithful would enjoy complete and deathless welfare in the fellowship of Ahura and his saints."

The theory that the ideas of immortality, resurrection, and retribution, existing, in a rudimentary form, in some Hebrew minds, were fostered "under the influence of a congenial though foreign religion," is confirmed not only by a comparison of certain psalm-passages with the Zoroastrian scriptures, but also by a study of later Jewish literature, especially the Psalms of Solomon and the Book of Enoch, a deeply interesting subject upon which, however, it is unnecessary for me to enter.¹

The influence of Zoroastrianism upon the later psalmists and prophets of Israel was transmitted by them to Christianity, which, on emerging from Judaism, formed the turning-point in human history, dividing the ancient from the modern world; it will be necessary, therefore, as an introduction to the poets and poetry of the latter, to dwell very briefly upon Mediæval Christianity, as embodied in the Mediæval Church.

¹ The subject is discussed at length in the "Bampton Lectures," by the Rev. T. K. Cheyne, M.A., D.D., to which I beg to express my obligation.

MEDIÆVAL CHRISTIANITY.

BELIEF in the existence of a righteous God, supreme and universal; all holy, all merciful, and all wise; omniscient, and omnipresent; invisible, yet holding spiritual communion with his worshippers; together with the vision of a Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, to be inaugurated by the promised Messiah; these conceptions, developed through a long roll of psalmists and prophets, constitute the contributions of Judaism to the progress of humanity.

At length, in the fulness of time, the more spiritual elements of Judaism, transfigured by transmission through the mind of Christ, after having been for ages the exclusive possession of a remote Semitic tribe, freed from their local and temporary associations, became the regenerating and life-giving principles of the civilized world. The divinities of the heathen pantheon, the ruins of whose magnificent temples still excite our wonder and admiration, in process of time were dethroned, and the Supreme Deity of the Hebrews, whose glory was reflected in the Son of Man, came to be recognized as the God and Father of the whole human race.

Thus, on the decline of Hellas, and when the power of Rome was on the wane, Christianity went forth, a new and vitalizing power, which has very gradually changed the aspect of the world. No contrast can be conceived more striking than that between the lofty idealism of the new faith, embodied in the exalted character and life of its founder, and the low moral tone, the materialism and sensuality which characterized the decline of ancient civilization.

Among the most terrible features of paganism, there is none more revolting than the cruelty which found excitement and gratification in gladiatorial combats, and other savage amusements of the amphitheatre, where vast multitudes of men, and where even women were "butchered to make a Roman holiday." It is impossible for us even to conceive the savage thirst for blood awakened in the Roman populace by these brutal sports.

Another frightful evil which characterized ancient civilization was the system of slavery upon which it was based; a prolific source of depravity and corruption. Existing on an immense scale in Imperial Rome (Cæcilius, as stated by Pliny, left 4,116 slaves after his death), it generated that indifference to human suffering, culminating in heartless cruelty, together with that contempt for labour, which are utterly opposed to the genius of Christianity.

The false position of women, illustrated alike by the severity of the old Roman law, where the husband had power of life and death over his wife, and by the frightful license which prevailed at the close of the Republic, is another characteristic of heathendom, repugnant to the new spiritual power introduced into the world; while the systematic exposure and abandonment of infants, practised alike by rich and poor, and to which frequent allusions are made by classical authors, reveals, under another aspect, the heartless depravity which, notwithstanding the exalted morality of the Stoics and other redeeming features of paganism, characterized pre-Christian civilization, as embodied in the vast empire of Rome.

Gradually, however, as the icy bonds of winter melt away before the balmy airs of spring, these gigantic evils, and many other pagan survivals, vanished, in the course of time, before the genial influences of the new religion, till at length the words of the Apostle were in a measure realized: "Old things have passed away, behold all things have become new."

Nevertheless, the Christians soon became aware that

the forces of the world, antagonistic to their faith, were so formidable as to preclude an early realization of their fondly cherished dream, of establishing upon earth a Kingdom of Heaven.

Accordingly, their aspirations were transferred from earth to Heaven; shrinking with abhorrence from the profound corruption by which they were surrounded, many of the more spiritually minded secluded themselves from the world, and, exulting in self-mortification, looked forward to the glory to be revealed beyond the grave. It is necessary to call attention to this phase of Mediæval Christianity, the embodiment of which, in poetry and art, presents one of the most striking contrasts to Hellenism, and revulsion from which constitutes the most characteristic feature of the Renaissance.

The Hellenes, with their passionate admiration for the Beautiful, regarded the human frame, in its supreme types, as the fittest vehicle for the manifestation of their divinities, and aimed, consequently, at its harmonious development. Asceticism, on the contrary, looked upon the body, with its appetites and passions, as the vehicle of temptation, and consequently as a deadly foe, to be held in absolute subjection by the higher nature.

This condition being fulfilled, it was believed that the soul, uplifted on the wings of faith and prayer, could, in contemplation of beatific visions, enjoy a foretaste of celestial bliss. Hence the expression of wrapt ecstasy, impressed upon the countenances of the Mediæval Saints; hence also the mystical rapture, the passionate devotion, which find expression in many of the Mediæval hymns. This artificial antagonism between the spiritual and the corporeal element in human nature, and the consequent suppression of its primary passions and affections had, however, a reverse side in the glorification of physical deformity, together with that distortion of the moral sense, by which it was too frequently accompanied, and of which we find such striking illustrations in the legendary history of many Mediæval Saints. This false and unnatural system led, in process of time, to a

reaction, which, stimulated towards the close of the fourteenth century by the recovery of the ancient classics, culminated in the Renaissance.

The results of this remarkable movement must not, however, be anticipated, and in the meantime it must be remembered that asceticism constituted only one phase of Mediæval Christianity, which, in its conflict with paganism, enlisted in the service of the Catholic Church, the various elements of culture inherited from the past, including philosophy and art.

Seeking a solution of problems which lie at the very root of religion, the Fathers of the Christian Church addressed themselves, for the most part, to questions of theology; coming in contact, at Alexandria, with the school of the Neo-Platonists, while triumphantly vindicating the fundamental truths of Christianity, their own views were profoundly modified by those of their opponents.

It is an interesting consideration, as illustrating the continuity of culture, that while, through Judaism, Christianity was, to a certain extent, influenced by the religion of Zoroaster, it should, at a subsequent period have been still more deeply influenced by its contact with Hellenism, another modification of the Aryan genius.

For a poetical embodiment of Mediævalism, under its varied aspects, theological, philosophical, and political, in the centuries anterior to the Renaissance, we must turn to the "*Divina Commedia*" of Dante, wherein tendencies may be discerned which prepare us for the subsequent transition from the Mediæval to the modern world.

ITALY.

DANTE. 1265-1321.

WOULD that any utterance of mine were worthy of the sublime genius who, with Homer, Æschylus, and Shakespeare, forms, in my judgment, the fourth main pillar in the temple of European song.

My object being, however, simply to consider a few of the world's great singers, as the interpreters of their age and as illustrating the progress of humanity, I am obliged to content myself with a very brief analysis of their works, alluding, at the same time, to a few of the influences inherited from the past, which tended to modify their genius, together with the new germs of sentiment and thought cast by each into the seed-plot of the world, without dwelling, as I would fain do, upon the manifold charm and beauty of their poetry.

The "*Divina Commedia*," which may be said to have inaugurated the literature of Modern Europe, while the most individual of poems, permeated, so to speak, with the personality of the author, may, at the same time, be regarded as an epitome of the century which gave it birth. In the poem, as in the age, elements the most heterogeneous are found side by side; Classicalism and Mediævalism, Catholicism and Materialism, beatific visions and appalling crimes, transcendental philosophy and subtlest scholasticism, with a growing taste for science and art, these, and other features of the mediæval age, are mirrored in the immortal poem of Dante.

Profoundly impressed by the violence and disorder

which everywhere prevailed, and which left the cities of Italy a prey to anarchy and civil war, he longed for the simultaneous sovereignty of two co-ordinate powers, each ruling by divine right, and absolute in his respective sphere, the Pope and the Emperor, by whose joint action alone, the reign of law and order could, in his judgment, be restored. Rising, moreover, above mere local and temporary interests, he regarded man as a twofold being, ordained for beatitude in this life and also in the life eternal, and consequently as requiring twofold direction, that of the supreme pontiff in spiritual, and of the Emperor in temporal matters, the supremacy of both being co-extensive with the globe, and indissolubly connected with the city of Rome. This ideal polity, a poet's dream, incapable of realization, yet cherished with passionate earnestness by Dante, is a pervading element in the "*Divina Commedia*," which, however, in its ultimate purpose, rises into a still loftier sphere transcending any mere mundane consideration.

Sharing the sentiment of the mediæval age, which regarded this world as valueless in itself, and as deriving its significance solely from its association with the world to come, the poet's primal aim appears to have been to bring home to the reader's mind the reality of things unseen, as revealing God's will, in the moral government of the world; or, to quote his own words: "The subject of the whole work, taken literally, is the state of souls after death; but, if the work is taken allegorically, the subject is Man, as, in the exercise of his free will, for good or for evil, rendering himself liable to reward or punishment." With transcendent genius, the poet enforces the great truth that the visible and invisible worlds, being associated as parts of one great whole, are equally under the immediate government of the Most High. The men and women who have passed into the unseen world are, in his poem, as real as those who are still playing their parts in this familiar scene; there, however, being judged by character alone, external distinctions disappear; Dante is no respecter of persons; high and

low, rich and poor, are associated together on equal terms, in bliss or in bale, enjoying the reward of their virtues or expiating their crimes.

Vast is the scope of the poem, and vast also is the range of emotion inspired by its perusal. In the "*Inferno*," as we descend from circle to circle, we are more and more impressed with "the exceeding sinfulness of sin," in its infinite variety of manifestation, and in some of its shapes, with its unutterable loathsomeness and malignity. We realize that lawless passion, gluttony, avarice, bestiality, hypocrisy, treachery and other deadly sins, constitute the soul's true Hell, of which the physical torments, by whose contemplation our hearts are wrung with pity and terror, are, for the most part, the outward and appropriate symbols.

Thus Paolo and Francesca, whose deeply pathetic story touches us to the quick, with the other victims of ungoverned passion, are swept onward, in sleepless agony, by the whirling blast. (*Infer. v.*)

Cerberus, the voracious hell-hound, fitly symbolizes the sin of gluttony, whose victims, rent by his remorseless jaws, wallow in the loathsome mire. (*Infer. vi.*)

Those in whom wrath, malice, and greed have triumphed over their better nature—tyrants, murderers, and robbers, seething in Phlegethon's boiling river of blood, and guarded by the Centaurs, find their representative in the Minotaur,—half human and half brute (*Infer. xii.*); while the blasphemers, those who have bid defiance to the Most High, lying prone and scorched upon the fiery sand, are rained upon by flakes of ever-spreading flame. (*Infer. xiv.*)

As still further illustrating the symbolic character of punishment in the "*Inferno*," I may refer to the Popes who had been guilty of simony, and who, "having inverted the true order of the spiritual society," are represented as plunged head downward in their fiery pits (*Infer. xix.*); thus also the hypocrites wear leaden cloaks and cowls, of crushing weight, overlaid with glittering gold (*Infer. xxiii.*). The authors of schism are them-

selves cleft in twain ; while those who, like Bertram de Boru, severed the ties of kindred, bear, in their hands, their own heads severed from the trunk." (Infer. xxvii.)

Finally, the lake of ice, with its frozen depths, divided into four concentric circles, typifies the sin of treachery ; "the hardness and coldness which is the ultimate doom of this, the most malignant form of evil, is gradually intensified as the traitors sink lower into the ice." (Infer. xxxiii.)

Our horror at the ghastly torments and brutalities of the "Inferno," is intensified by the awful words inscribed upon the gate :

"My lofty Maker was by justice moved ;
The power of God it was that fashioned me,
Supernal Wisdom and the Primal Love ;
All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

This inscription is founded upon the doctrine of Aquinas, who taught that Divine love required the eternal misery of the lost.

How the Mediæval Church could reconcile its conception of God, as Infinite Love, with its belief in an eternity of sin, involving an eternity of physical agony and mental anguish, is a curious psychological problem.

Nowhere is this anomaly more strikingly exhibited than in the "Divina Commedia," where, in the "Inferno," the torments of the lost are portrayed with relentless ferocity, while, in the "Paradiso," the poet dwells with ecstasy upon the vision of the Most High, as the perennial source of light and love ; innumerable passages might, moreover, be quoted to show that, following in the footsteps of St. Bernard, Dante regarded love as the true fulfilling of the law, and consequently as lying at the root of all moral regeneration.

This union of apparently incompatible qualities, which forms so striking a feature of the "Divina Commedia," manifests itself also in the character of the poet. Thus, at times, his yearning pity for the sufferers is so intense that, after listening to the tale of Paolo and Francesca,

he falls prostrate like a dead man (*Infer.* v. 141); while the savage joy with which he contemplates the torments of his compatriot, Filippo Argenti (*Infer.* viii. 37-60), recalls the fierce hatred which occasionally finds expression in his letters, of which it has been said, that "they bite like vitriol, and scald like boiling lead."

That the prolonged contemplation of physical agony, as a manifestation of the divine justice, must tend to sear the conscience, and to harden the heart, finds striking illustration in the cruelty and treachery which Dante represents himself as practising towards Bocca degli Abbate, and Fra Alberigo, two traitors who were meeting their doom in the lowest depths of Hell. (*Infer.* xxxii. 97-104; xxxiii. 116-140.)

That the poet should, with evident self-glorification, attribute to himself conduct so atrocious, is most instructive, as exhibiting the mental blindness generated by the indulgence of hatred and scorn, even when directed against so vile a traitor as Fra Alberigo.

Doubtless, in coming in contact with paganism, Christianity assimilated not only many of its conceptions, but also many of its modes of thought and feeling, her emancipation from which, with the progress of civilization, has been a slow and gradual process.

As reflecting this phase of Christianity, deep interest attaches to the "*Inferno*," where, in a nominally Christian poem, we are met, at every turn, by pagan images and personages, borrowed from Hades, as portrayed by the classical poets. Thus we are introduced to the four rivers of Hell, Acheron, with its grim ferryman, Styx, Phlegethon and Cocytus; Minos the judge, passes sentence upon the lost, whom he relegates to their respective circles. As we descend, we encounter Cerberus with his triple jaws, Plutus, Phlegyas, and the city of Dis, guarded by the Furies; Medusa and the Minotaur; Centaurs and Harpies; the winged monster Geryon, Ephialtes, Antæus, and other direful shapes, in harmony with the horrors of the Mediæval Hell.

It would almost seem, indeed, as if the poet recognized

that his own soul had been contaminated by his prolonged contemplation of evil in its most malignant forms;—hence Cato's injunction that, before ascending the mountain of purification, Virgil should cleanse his face from the stain which it had contracted in Hell, or, in other words, should restore the marred purity of his soul. (Pur. i. 95.)

It is with a sense of inexpressible relief that, leaving the stifling atmosphere and the Stygian darkness of the nether world, we emerge into the pure and serene air of Purgatory, radiant with the colour of Oriental sapphire, and illumined by the morning star. Transcending all sublunary splendour, however, the souls in Purgatory, during their toilsome ascent of the mountain of purification, are cheered by the blessed light of Hope. Recognizing, moreover, the justice of their punishment, far from rebelling against the retributive torments to which they were subjected, the symbolical character of which is even more obvious than in the "*Inferno*," they rejoice in their purifying pains as the indispensable media for purging away the sinful dross which intercepts their vision of the Most High. It is this recognition of the reformatory character of punishment which constitutes the most striking difference between the "*Inferno*" and the "*Purgatorio*." Upon the touching personal episodes which impart so great a charm to the "*Purgatorio*," I must not dwell at any length, and can only briefly allude to the poet's meeting with Casalla, who entranced the listeners with his delightful song (Pur. ii. 76-117), and to his visit to the flowery vale, where he pronounces his magnificent eulogium upon the Malaspini family, by whom, during his exile, he was received as a guest, and treated with the greatest hospitality (Pur. viii. 121-132); nor must I linger upon his colloquy with Guido Guinicelli, of whose noble poetry he speaks with the highest praise (Pur. xxvi.). Upon the meeting of Dante and Virgil with Sordello and subsequently with Statius, I shall dwell in another connection, and must now pass on to notice, very briefly,

a few of the marvellous experiences which meet the poet as he climbs painfully the mountain of purgation. Very wonderful are the life-like sculptures on the wall and pavement of the first circle, the subjects of which, setting forth examples of humility and pride, are taken indiscriminately from scripture and from classical antiquity, and which seem prophetic of the noble works which were ere long to be executed by Italian sculptors; they may also be regarded as illustrating the free use made by the Mediæval Church of the pictorial art inherited from the pagan world, into which, adapting it to the requirements of the new religion, she breathed the breath of Christian life; with scenes from the Old and New Testaments, treated for the most part symbolically, were associated, occasionally, classical figures, among which Orpheus offers a typical example, and which she made the vehicle of religious instruction. Thus Christian art, born in the catacombs, continuing from age to age her gracious ministry, culminated in the magnificent cathedrals of the thirteenth century based upon the Roman basilica, wherein architecture enlisted in her service the splendour of colour, and the charm of sculptural ornamentation, while her pointed roofs, rising far above the worshipper, symbolized the lofty hopes and aspirations awakened by the Christian faith.

The beautiful frescoes in the Paduan chapel, were, moreover, executed by Giotto, the contemporary and friend of Dante, and may have been instrumental in inspiring the poet's ideal sculptures in the "Purgatorio."

Wierd and strange are the mysterious voices of encouragement and warning, celebrating brotherly love and deprecating envy, which reverberate like thunder around the holy mountain, while the pictures of nature, which are exquisitely beautiful, reveal the sensibility of the poet to her manifold charms, together with his recognition of her gracious and healing influences.

Glorious are the angels, some "bright with intolerable radiance," who, as he ascends from circle to circle, cancel from his brow the marks of sin; the wall of fire,

through which he passes into the earthly paradise, is a fit prelude to the wonderful procession, including patriarchs, prophets, and elders, marvellous symbolical figures, impersonations of the virtues, cardinal and theological, together with Paul and the apostles, ending with the solitary figure of St. John; "a glorious company" heralding the descent of Beatrice, who appears veiled in a cloud of flowers, showered by angel hands.

Then follows Dante's humble confession, the essential condition of pardon and restoration, a passage unique in literature; we are thus prepared for the surpassing glories of the "Paradiso;" for the poet's ascent from planet to planet, each with its special characteristic; for his vision of the starry heavens and of the "Primum Mobile;" "the apocalypse of glory" culminating in his ecstatic contemplation of the Emyrean, as mirrored in the eyes of Beatrice; and for the still grander manifestation of the celestial rose, with its golden centre, whose splendour radiates to the vast circumference, symbolizing the presence of God, the eternal source of love and light and joy, whence the golden-winged angels, with their faces aflame, gather the celestial peace and sacred fire which they carry to the ranks of beatified saints, typified by the snow-white petals of the mystic rose. The feelings awakened by the contemplation of Dante's beatific vision cannot perhaps be more adequately expressed than by the words of our English poet, who, in wrapt ecstasy, gazes on Mont Blanc,

"Till the dilating soul, enwrapt, transfused,
Into the mighty vision passing, there,
As in her natural form, swells vast to heaven."

While, as we have seen, many of the more revolting features of Pagan mythology were retained in the Mediæval Hell, as pictured by Dante, the more gracious figures of the ancient Pantheon were superseded, not only by the fundamental conception of Christianity, that of God, as the Heavenly Father, whose glory was reflected in the Son of Man, but also by a host of super-

human Beings, including the Virgin, and other divine personages, together with a Hierarchy of Angels and of Saints, who, regarded during the middle ages as spiritual realities, were objects of universal love and adoration.

Upon this mythological element of Mediæval Christianity, which pervades the "*Divina Commedia*," it is not necessary to dwell at any length.

Among the agencies tending to develop Dante's genius, a prominent place must be assigned to St. Augustine, together with the great schoolmen of Mediæval Catholicism, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Anselm, St. Bernard, Hugo de St. Victore, and others, whose writings, doctrinal and devotional, have coloured passages innumerable of the "*Divina Commedia*."¹ Upon this large subject, however, I shall not enter, but shall briefly call attention to other agencies, which have also left their impress upon the work of our great Mediæval poet; I refer especially to the following; namely, the writers of classical antiquity; the poetry of the *Trouvères* and *Troubadours*, together with the early Italian poets; the psalmody of the early Catholic Church; and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

Dante's frequent allusions to events and personages, historical and mythical, of Hellas and of Rome, bear witness to a certain familiarity with classical literature, of which we have, moreover, direct evidence both in the "*Inferno*" (c. iv.), and in the "*Purgatorio*" (c. xxii.).

It must not, however, be forgotten that Dante was the poet of Mediævalism, and that, during the so-called dark ages, the attitude of the Church towards the master-works of classical antiquity, as embodying pagan mythology, and pagan ideals of life, was decidedly hostile.

Hence, scholastic theology, together with the lives and legends of the Saints, superseded the classics as objects of study. Nevertheless, the knowledge of Latin being required for ecclesiastic uses, it was necessary that some Latin authors should be taught in the schools. Accordingly, to quote the words of Mr. J. A. Symonds,

¹ See Notes to Dean Plumptre's Translation of Dante.

to whom I am indebted for the above remark, "it may be said in brief that Virgil was continually studied, and that a certain familiarity with Ovid, Lucan, Horace, Juvenal, and Statius, was never lost." On turning to the "*Inferno*," we find that, in traversing the first circle, girding the abyss of Hell, the four poets who are encountered by Dante, and to whom he assigns the highest honour, are the first three mentioned above, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan, with the addition of Homer; they, together with Virgil, invite him to join their company :

"Si ch'io fui sesto tra cotanto senno."

Under their escort he is introduced to a goodly assemblage of sages, headed by Aristotle; "The Master of those who know," of whom, through a Latin translation, he had been a diligent student, as shown, not only by frequent allusions, both to his physics and his ethics, in the "*Divina Commedia*," but also from the numerous quotations from his works found in the "*Convito*."

With regard to Horace, though furnishing many quotations from Dante's prose works, no trace of his influence can be detected in the "*Divina Commedia*;" innumerable passages, however, bear witness to Dante's familiarity with the "*Metamorphoses*" of Ovid, the incidents and personages of which, transfigured by his genius, appear in the "*Inferno*," the "*Purgatorio*," and the "*Paradiso*," while in one celebrated scene (*Infer. xxv.*), he distinctly challenges a comparison with a Roman poet. This he does also with Lucan, of whom he was evidently a diligent student, as evinced by his conception of Cato, and by his allusion to numerous passages in the "*Pharsalia*."¹

The meeting between Virgil and Statius, in the "*Purgatorio*" (*c. xxii.*), is one of the most touching episodes in the "*Divina Commedia*."

It occurs when Statius, having completed his work of purgation, the whole mountain is tremulous with joy, and all the spirits who had shared his penance, burst into a jubilant chant, "*Gloria in Excelsis Deo*," listen-

¹ See Notes to Dean Plumptre's Translation of Dante.

ing to which, in rapt wonder, Virgil and Dante stand motionless, "as did the shepherds who first heard that song." (Purg. xx. 127, 146.) Statius, after replying to the inquiry of Virgil as to his name and the sin which has detained him so long in Purgatory, concludes by expressing his intense admiration for the "*Æneid*" (Purg. xxi. 94, 130), and declares his love for Virgil to be so great that, to have lived with him on earth, he would have done penance for another year, before his translation to Paradise; and on learning from Dante that he is in the presence of Virgil, he bows reverently down to embrace his master's feet.

When questioned by Virgil, in highly figurative language, as to how he became a Christian, Statius replies (Purg. xxii. 61-72):

"Thou first my steps didst guide
Towards Parnassus, in its grotts to drink,
And first my road to God thou didst illume."

He then refers to Virgil's fourth Eclogue, 5-7, with its quotation from the Sibylline prophecy, which, from a very early age, had been regarded as predicting the advent of Christ.

"The season is renewed,
Justice returns, and man's primeval age,
And a new progeny descends from Heaven;
Poet I was through thee, through thee a Christian."

In the previous lines he compares Virgil to one walking by night, carrying a light behind him, of no profit to himself, but making wise those who follow after.

Very beautiful is the character of Virgil, as portrayed by Dante; though doomed himself to the joyless region, the air of which was tremulous with sighs, where, with his fellow-exiles from Heaven, he lives, exempt indeed from pain, but uncheered by hope, he feels no envy of Statius, his brother poet, who, having through his agency escaped the dismal fate of the unbaptized, is about to enter the society of the blest, the Paradise, from which he will be for ever excluded.

Very beautiful also are the words of warning and of encouragement with which, in fulfilment of the task confided to him by Beatrice, he admonishes Dante as he conducts him on his perilous career.

Thus, when Dante, paralyzed by fear, shrinks from the appalling flames through which he must pass in order to reach the earthly Paradise, Virgil reminds him that the flames he so much dreads, are as a wall separating him from Beatrice; and when, in the midst of the fiery furnace, the torture is so exquisite that he would fain have cast himself into molten glass to cool his agony, Virgil, in order to distract his attention, still speaks to him of Beatrice. "Then my gentle Father," Dante tells us, "still speaking of Beatrice, went on," leading the way, "saying already I seem to see her eyes."

No mother, it seems to me, would have dealt more tenderly with a loved and faltering child.

Among the characteristic features of Mediævalism there are few more remarkable than the legendary halo which gathered round the personality of Virgil, who was regarded not only as a philosopher and poet, and as endowed with wonder-working power, but also, as we have seen in Dante's "ideal biography" of Statius, as a prophet of Christianity. This profound reverence for Virgil culminates in Dante, to whom he became the impersonation of human philosophy and wisdom, and also of the human conscience. Innumerable passages might be quoted bearing witness to the great love and profound reverence with which the Mantuan bard was regarded by his successor. Thus, on Virgil's first appearance, Dante, inspired with new-born courage, exclaims: "My Leader thou, my Lord, and thou my Master." (*Infer.* ii. 140.) And immediately after the departure of Virgil, he is thus apostrophized by Dante: "Virgil, sweetest Father; Virgil to whom for my salvation I gave myself." (*Purg.* xxx. 50.)

To Virgil, moreover, he was largely indebted for his grand conception of the Roman Empire, in his imagina-

tion the type and embodiment of imperial majesty and strength, to the reestablishment of which, under some political Messiah, as a real government, based on justice and law, he looked forward as the only means of rescuing his beloved Italy from the terrible disorders in which she was involved.

Bidding farewell to classical literature, I must now briefly call attention to another feature of Mediævalism, which we find reflected in the "*Divina Commedia*."

Cherishing with pride the remembrance of Ancient Rome, and destitute of any native legendary lore, Italy was slower than other European nations in developing a vernacular language and literature. Hence she welcomed with enthusiasm the Trouvères and Troubadours of France, "who sang to her people the song of Roland, and to her nobles the Arthurian romance," and whose language was adopted by her poets. It is interesting to remember, as illustrating the popularity of the Provençal literature in Italy, at the time of Dante, that in the pathetic story of Paolo and Francesca (*Infer.* c. x.), the tale which they were reading, on the fatal day of their fall, was that of Queen Guinivere and Lancelot of the Lake.

The terrible picture of Bertram dal Bornio, suffering the penalty of his crimes in the "*Inferno*" (c. xxv.), together with the high tribute paid by his brother poet, Guinicelli, to Arnould Daniel, in the "*Purgatorio*" (c. xxvii. 115), bear witness to Dante's intimate acquaintance with the productions of the Provençal bards.

Among the Italian Troubadours, the most memorable is Sordello of Mantua, who, majestic in his loneliness,

"A guisa di leon quando si posa,"

is immortalized by Dante in the "*Purgatorio*" (c. vi. 76); the distinguished position assigned by Dante to the Mantuan Troubadour may be regarded as a tribute of gratitude and respect paid by the greatest of the Italian poets to the singers of Provence, "who first gave lyrical expression to the more delicate sentiments of the human

heart, and whose high glory it is to have inspired the early poets of Italy—the masters of Dante and Petrarch.”

We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Dante Gabriel Rossetti for having introduced us, through the medium of his admirable translations, to these early Italian poets, of whom he enumerates upwards of forty, who lived chiefly before Dante, and thirteen who belonged to the Poet's circle. Among the former, special interest attaches to Guido Guinicelli, as having, “in his treatment of chivalrous love, infused into his subject a spirit of philosophical mysticism,” and of whom Dante speaks as “Father of myself and others my betters, who have practised sweet and graceful love-verse.” Thus having, in a beautiful canzone, ventured to compare the vision of Truth, revealed in his lady's eyes, to the glory of the unveiled face of God, and, on passing into heaven, being asked by God :

“What darest thou?
To make me of vain love similitude.”

He proceeds :

“Then may I plead: as though from Thee he came,
Love more an angel's face:
Lord, if I loved her, count it not my shame.”

Very beautiful also are the following concluding lines of a sonnet, in praise of his lady :

“Love's self, being love for her, must holier prove.
Ever as she walks she hath a sober grace,
Making bold men abash'd, and good men glad;
If she delights thee not, thy heart must err.
No man dare look on her his thoughts being base;
Nay, let me say even more than I have said:—
No man could think base thoughts who look'd on her.”

Foremost among the poets of Dante's circle is Guido Cavalcanti, who plays a conspicuous part in the fierce quarrels which then distracted Florence, and who, with the contending factions was, in 1301, banished the city, Dante being at the time one of its chief magistrates.

Born about 1250, he was Dante's senior by some fifteen years. Distinguished by great personal beauty, high accomplishments of all kinds, and daring nobility of spirit, and being at the same time of a fitful and vehement temper, he was "not unworthy to have been the object of Dante's early emulation, the first friend of his youth, and his precursor and fellow-labourer in the creation of Italian poetry." The following sonnet, in which he compares all things with his lady, and finds them wanting, seems to justify the high esteem in which he was held as a poet.

"Beauty in woman; the high will's desire;
 Fair knighthood arm'd for manly exercise;
 The pleasant song of birds; love's soft replies;
 The strength of rapid ships upon the sea;
 The serene air when light begins to be;
 The white snow, without wind that falls and lies;
 Fields of all flower; the place where waters rise;
 Silver and gold; azure in jewellery;—
 Weighed against these, the sweet and quiet worth
 Which my dear lady cherishes at heart,
 Might seem a little matter to be shown;
 Being truly over these, as much apart
 As the whole heaven is greater than this earth,
 All good to kindred natures cleaveth soon."

"Besides the various affectionate allusions to Guido in the 'Vita Nuova,' Dante has unmistakably referred to him in at least two passages of the 'Commedia.' One of these references is to be found in those famous lines of the 'Purgatory' (c. xi.), where he awards him the palm of poetry over Guido Guinicelli (though also of the latter he speaks elsewhere with high praise), and implies at the same time, it would seem, a consciousness of his own supremacy over both."

The other mention of Guido is in that pathetic passage of the "Inferno" (c. x.), where Dante meets, among the lost souls, the spirit of Guido's father, Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, who, being notoriously a sceptic in matters of religion, was placed by Dante in the sixth circle of the "Inferno," in one of the fiery tombs of the unbelievers.

"That Guido's poems dwelt in the mind of Dante is evident by his having appropriated lines from them (as well as from those of Guinicelli), with little alteration, more than once, in the '*Commedia*.'"

Another poet whom Dante honoured with his friendship was Cino da Pistoia, of whom he says, "Those who have most sweetly and subtly written poems in modern Italian are Cino da Pistoia and a friend of his." This friend being Dante himself. Cino was also the friend of Petrarch, who wrote a lament upon his death, bestowing upon him the highest praise.

Beautiful and graceful, however, as are many poems of Dante's predecessors and contemporaries, and deep as is the interest which attaches to them, as having contributed, even in the humblest degree, to his intellectual development, nothing tends more to exalt our conception of his transcendent genius than a glance at their narrow scope and limited range, as compared with the magnificent amplitude of the "*Divina Commedia*." Of Dante it may be truly said that, above his contemporaries he wings his majestic flight, like a puissant eagle above a flock of smaller birds.

Among the elements of Mediævalism which are reflected in the pages of Dante, a prominent place must be assigned to the psalmody of the Roman Catholic Church, which was wrought into the very texture of the poet's soul.

Among the civilizing agencies in operation during the dark ages, an important part must be assigned to the wonderful body of Mediæval hymns which, originating in the fourth century, with Prudentius and St. Ambrose, reached their highest perfection in the century immediately preceding the appearance of the "*Divina Commedia*."

On consummating her triumph over paganism, Christianity had found the Latin language, as employed by classical authors, inadequate to meet the spiritual requirements of her votaries. Her attitude, moreover, towards classical literature, as embodying pagan mytho-

logy and pagan morality, was decidedly hostile. Accordingly, the poets of the early Church, yearning to give expression to the larger thoughts and loftier aspirations by which they were possessed, were led to neglect the metres of classical literature, and to substitute for them new lyrical forms, in which quantity was superseded by accent and rhyme, thus laying the foundation for the poetry of modern times.

These compositions, many of which are of high excellence, and still hold their place in the services of the Catholic Church, were valuable, not only as ministering to religious emotion, but also as contributing to the development of the human mind, at a period when, with the exception of the classics, there were few sources of literary culture.

In the "*Divina Commedia*," wherein were concentrated the various poetic elements pervading the early Christian Church, the spirit of Mediæval Catholicism finds its highest expression; it cannot, therefore, surprise us to hear the hymns and anthems of the Roman breviary chanted alike by the souls in Purgatory, and by the angels in Paradise, and nowhere can a higher tribute be paid to the power of music, with its soothing, purifying and elevating influences. Thus Dante represents himself as transported in ecstasy at hearing the hymn, "*Te lucis ante*," chanted by a spirit in Purgatory (viii. 13); and when, overwhelmed with humiliation, he stands in the presence of Beatrice, "as snows congealed by the northern blast yield to the southern breeze, so the ice which had gathered round his heart melts as he listens to the angels' song, '*In te speravi, Domine.*'" (xxx. 97.)

How deeply the mind of Dante was imbued with the mediæval psalmody is seen by the fact that, when Virgil announces to his companion the presence of Lucifer, he employs the first words of Fortunatus's celebrated "*Passion Hymn*," transferring them, doubtless ironically, to the king of Hell. "*Vexilla Regis prodeunt Inferni*," the wings of Lucifer being the banners referred to.

Dante's frequent allusions to the characters and events

of sacred story, which he mingles indiscriminately with those of classical and early Christian times, show how completely his mind was saturated not only with pagan and Mediæval lore, but also with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

His intense yearning for a national deliverer would, moreover, bring him into closest sympathy with the great prophets of Israel, whose special characteristics he appears to me most strikingly to reproduce. Thus the burning indignation with which he brands all forms of sin, as the direst apostasy against the majesty of Heaven, together with his glowing enthusiasm for the righteous and the true, remind us of Isaiah. Still closer, however, was the affinity existing between the seer of Italy and the prophet of Anathoth, from whom he borrowed the three symbolic figures (Jer. v. 6), the leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf, which obstruct his path in the first canto of the "*Inferno*." Doomed to hopeless exile, his heart yearns for his beloved Florence as the heart of the Hebrew prophet yearns for Jerusalem; both pour forth their words of earnest warning to their infatuated fellow-countrymen, and both found relief for their own blighted hopes in visions of a resuscitated fatherland. Dante's wonderful symbolism, displayed more especially in the magnificent vision which occupies the concluding cantos of the "*Purgatorio*," shows how completely his mind was imbued with the works of another exile, the seer of Chebar, whose imagery is there intimately associated with that of the Apocalypse of St. John, with whose genius, as with that of Ezekiel and of the other prophets of Israel, Dante was in profoundest sympathy.

In Henry of Luxemburg, elected to the imperial throne in 1308, he recognized the new political Messiah, of whom he was himself to be the herald and the forerunner. In prophetic vision he already saw the realization of his fondly cherished dream, the advent of a golden age, a reign of righteousness and peace. His letter, addressed to the kings, nobles, and people of Italy, proclaiming the advent of the new Messiah, is couched in language

almost identical with that of the great Hebrew prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, of whose utterances we are also reminded by some passages in the letter which he addressed to the citizens of Florence, whom he characterizes as "scelestissimi Florentini." His long-cherished hopes of a theocratic empire were blighted by Henry's untimely death; how reverently his memory was cherished by Dante may be inferred from the fact that, among the few vacant places in the Rose of Paradise, one was reserved for the soul of Henry of Luxemburg.

From this brief survey of the agencies, classical and mediæval, which contributed to the development of Dante's genius, I pass on to consider a few of the ideas and sentiments which, through the influence of Christianity, impressed a distinct character upon the poetry and art of mediæval and modern times, as compared with those of classical antiquity, and which, with the exception of the psalmody of the Church, found their first poetical embodiment in the "*Divina Commedia*." Among these ideas, supreme importance attaches to the conception of God as the infinitely perfect, without beginning and without end, the creator and upholder of the universe, whose glory was reflected in the Son of Man.

To this infinite perfection Christians are invited to aspire, as their loftiest ideal: "Be ye perfect even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect." "This conception carries in it, as its crowning grace and truth, this distinctive feature that it renders Humility an eternal attitude for all finite minds, rather deepening than declining with their spiritual advance; for it is the spirit's upturned look which, directed upon the All-Holy, can never overtake the vision that entrances it and draws it on."¹

Nowhere in the wide range of literature has this distinctive feature of Christianity found such forcible expression as in the "*Divina Commedia*." To Dante, Beatrice was the highest impersonation of the Supernal

¹ "Seat of Authority in Religion." James Martineau, LL.D., D.C.L.

Glory. In her he beheld the supreme type of heavenly wisdom, heavenly truth, and heavenly love, and throughout his pilgrimage he followed reverently the image which he could never hope to overtake.

Nothing can exceed the depth of humiliation with which, as he listens to her reproaches, he recognizes that, in yielding to the seduction of the lower things of earth, he has been unfaithful to his own loftiest ideal. It was only through this recognition of his deep unworthiness that he was prepared, under Beatrice's guidance, to ascend from heaven to heaven, till, at last, he is permitted to gaze upon the unutterable glory of the uncreated light.

The type of character generated by this glorification of purity and humility, as pre-eminently Christian virtues, presents a striking contrast to the pagan ideal of excellence, with its haughty self-reliance and proud self-assertion, as represented in Aristotle's "magnanimous man."

The prosperity of the wicked, together with the calamities by which the righteous were not unfrequently assailed, had sorely tried the faith of the pious Hebrews, whose perplexity upon this point has found expression in many of their most beautiful psalms. This apparent anomaly was equally inexplicable to the Hellenes, who, while recognizing the existence of the gods, and their interference in human affairs, could not understand their apparent indifference to moral considerations, in allowing the triumph of the wicked, while the virtuous were left, not only unrewarded, but in many cases were overwhelmed by calamity.

This mental attitude is strikingly exhibited, not only, as we have seen, in the "Antigone" of Sophocles, but also in the following passage from the poet Theognis, who flourished B.C. 549. "Zeus, lord beloved, I marvel at thee; thine is honour and great power, and thou knowest the very heart and spirit of each man, for thy might, O king, is supreme. How then, son of Cronos, can thy soul endure to hold in like regard the sinner and the righteous? . . . Heaven has given to mortals

no clear token, nor shown the way by which if a man walk he may please the immortals. Howbeit the wicked prosper and are free from trouble, while those who keep their souls from base deeds, although they love justice, have for their portion poverty—poverty, mother of helplessness, which tempts the mind of man to transgression, and, by a cruel constraint, mars the reason in his breast.”¹

This perplexity tended doubtless to intensify that feeling of sadness, which, resulting from the apparent incongruity between the aspirations of mortals and their destiny, permeates, as we have seen, the literature of Hellas.

The principle involved in Christ's declaration: “The Kingdom of Heaven is within you,” underlies the Christian ideal of the perfect life. Based upon unswerving allegiance to the Divine Will, it demands loyal obedience to the dictates of conscience, with its guerdon of inward peace, irrespective of outward victory or of apparent defeat.

This recognition of inward blessedness, rather than of outward prosperity, as a token of Divine favour, a conception which revolutionized men's notions of the Divine government, is another Christian element embodied in the “*Divina Commedia*” of Dante.

Very striking also was the change wrought in the conception of love, which followed the emancipation of woman from the degrading conditions by which she had been surrounded in the pagan world; no longer regarded as a mere sensual emotion, the passion of love assumed a character at once more spiritual and more ideal, until it became to the lover a source of the purest rapture and most exalting inspiration. Nowhere has the higher sentiment for woman which prevailed during the middle ages, the joint product of Christianity and chivalry, found more exquisite expression than in Dante's relation to Beatrice, who, to borrow the words of Mr. Lowell, “was idealized by a passionate intellect and a profound

¹ Quoted by H. S. Butcher, M.A.

nature, till she became a half human, half divine abstraction; a woman still to memory and devotion, a disembodied spirit to the ecstasy of thought." "Type of man's finer conscience and nobler aspiration, made sensible to him only through her."

Dante's profound recognition of the Roman Catholic Church, as a dominant, external power, invested from on high, in spiritual matters, with authority which could not be questioned, stamps him as peculiarly the poet of the mediæval age. His unswerving allegiance to the Catholic Church manifests itself by his loyal acceptance of her dogmas, even when at variance with what appeared to him to be the dictates of eternal Right. Thus, though yearning with passionate eagerness, to reconcile with divine justice the exclusion of Virgil, and other virtuous heathens, from the realms of bliss, he nevertheless accepted the awful mystery, and bowed submissively to the authority of the Church. At the same time, "he was," as has been truly said, "the first religious Reformer," and nothing can exceed the fearless boldness with which he denounces spiritual wickedness in high places; three Popes, who had been guilty of simony, having, as we have seen, been relegated by him to the "Inferno." Hence, while emphatically the interpreter of the middle ages, and especially of the Mediæval Church, his defiant attitude towards ecclesiastical delinquencies stamps him as the herald of the coming era, and entitles him to be regarded as the harbinger of the Reformation.

Notwithstanding the darker aspects of Roman Catholicism, with its blood-stained Inquisition, its hostility to science, and to all freedom of thought, together with other institutions and tendencies opposed to the genius of Christianity, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that, during the darkness of the middle ages, civilization owes a deep debt to the Roman Catholic Church.

Amid the anarchy attending the Fall of Rome, and the consequent overthrow of all ancient institutions, civil and religious, the Church still bore emphatic witness to

the existence of an unseen spiritual power, while the great monastic communities tended to counteract those numerous disintegrating agencies which, if left unchecked, might have resulted in a return to barbarism.

Feudalism, moreover, having established itself on the ruins of the Roman Empire, threatened to crush beneath its iron yoke the infant nationalities which were just emerging out of chaos, and to render impossible the reign of law and order. The proud pretensions of kings and nobles quailed before the power of the Church, the visible embodiment, though in a distorted form, of invisible realities. The crozier triumphed over the sword; kings and emperors bowed submissively before the decrees of the Roman Pontiff, and time was thus gained for the gradual development of the popular power in the various nations of Europe.

It was, however, as impossible as it was undesirable, that this attitude of submission to ecclesiastical authority should be maintained in presence of the new spiritual forces which, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, were coming into operation; forces destined eventually to undermine the Catholic Church, whose vast structure had for ages afforded shelter to the poetry, the philosophy, and the religion of mankind.

PETRARCH.

1304-1374.

THE work of disruption in Italy was unconsciously initiated by Dante's successor to the poetic throne, Francisca Petrarca, one of the most noteworthy figures of the fourteenth century. Possessed by a passionate enthusiasm for antiquity, he devoted himself with unflagging zeal to the recovery of ancient manuscripts, especially those of Cicero, of whom he was a devoted admirer; thus substituting a new authority for the traditions of the Church. He has been appropriately

styled the apostle of scholarship, and the inaugurator of the humanistic impulse of the fifteenth century, a movement which, culminating in the Reformation, shattered for ever the unity of Western Christendom. Bitterly opposed to the narrow views of scholastic theologians, to the puerilities and falsities of the middle age materialists, and to whatever might impede the free play of the intellect, he has been hailed as the Columbus of a new 'spiritual hemisphere, and the discoverer of modern culture.'

Very striking is the contrast presented by the external circumstances of the two great poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. While the latter years of Dante's life were spent in poverty and exile, exposed to humiliations which, to his haughty and independent spirit, must have been wellnigh unendurable, Petrarch, at a comparatively early age, exercised an immense and widespread influence, was universally honoured and esteemed, was invested by the Senate of Rome with the laurel crown,—an honour which had not been conferred by that body for 1,300 years,—and lived on terms of equality with popes, emperors, kings, and dukes; of him it has been said that "he was undoubtedly the first man who, after the irruption of the barbarians, and the night of the middle ages, raised the culture of letters to supreme honour."²

Great however as was the diversity in their external circumstances, the lives of Dante and of Petrarch offer some striking points of resemblance. Both were Italian patriots, possessed by an intense longing for the political regeneration of their country, for her unity, her deliverance from foreign oppressors, and for her internal peace,—objects for the accomplishment of which they looked to the reestablishment of the Imperial authority at Rome, coexisting with the papal power. Both were doomed to bitter disappointment, Dante, as we have seen, by the death of Henry of Luxemburg; and Petrarch by the ignominious retreat of the Emperor Clement IV.,

¹ See "Life of Petrarch," by Henry Reeve.

² *Ibid.*

after receiving the iron crown at Milan, and the crown of gold at Rome. The poet's indignation at this dastardly flight, vented itself in a letter to His Imperial Majesty, in which he says: "Go whithersoever you please, but remember that no prince before you ever renounced a hope so beautiful, so attainable, and so honourable." And on receiving as a present from Clement, an antique coin, bearing the image of Cæsar, he writes: "If this medal could speak, what would it not have said to prevent your shameful retreat!"

Petrarch, like Dante, took an active part in public affairs, and in letters, breathing the fervour of the old Hebrew prophets, exhorted the princes, the nobles, and the cities of Italy to suspend their internecine hostilities, and to cooperate for the salvation of their country. "Among these letters, particularly noteworthy is the one addressed to Andrea Dandolo, Doge of Venice, deprecating the deadly war, then being waged between that city and Genoa. 'Think,' he says, 'that those whom you are going to attack are your brothers. At Thebes, of old, two brothers fought to their mutual destruction; must Italy renew, in our days, so atrocious a spectacle? . . . Throwing myself at the feet of the chiefs of two nations who are going to war, I say to them, with tears in my eyes, "throw away your arms; give one another the embrace of peace!" Unite your hearts, and your colours' etc. Earnestly desiring to put an end to this fraternal war, he wrote also to the Genoese government, but without effect."

Dante's passionate desire to perfect the Italian language was also shared by Petrarch, and both, as men of letters, were distinguished by their indefatigable industry. Though the later poet never reached the grandeur and sublimity of his mighty predecessor, nevertheless, in felicity of poetic expression, he attained to a height of perfection which has never been surpassed. Of both it may be said with truth that

"They arose
To raise a language, and their land reclaim
From the dull yoke of her barbaric foes."

Intense, however, as was the desire of both poets to perfect the Italian language, the reform of the Catholic Church was a common object which they had far more deeply at heart. Nothing can exceed the boldness, the vehement indignation with which they both inveigh against papal luxury and corruption. Dante, as we have seen, does not hesitate to find a place in his "Inferno" for three Simoniacal Popes, Nicholas III., Boniface VIII., and Clement V., whom he plunges head downward in their fiery pits, while, in his work entitled "A Book of Letters without a Title," Petrarch compares Avignon "with the Assyrian Babylon, with Egypt under the mad tyranny of Cambyses;" nay, he tells us that "neither Avernus nor Tartarus can be confronted with this infernal place." The same sentiments find expression in his three celebrated sonnets,

CV.

Fiamma dal ciel su le tue treccie piova.

CVI.

L'avare Babilonia ha colmo 'l sacco.

CVII.

Fontana de Dolore, Albergo d'ira.

In the second of these sonnets, after dwelling upon the vices of "Covetous Babylon," which has chosen not Jove and Pallas, but Venus and Bacchus for her gods, he consoles himself with anticipating the advent of a New Soldan, who shall scatter to the dust her idols, and her lofty towers, the enemies of God.

"Fair souls, the friends of virtue, then the world
Shall rule in peace; and we the age of gold
Shall see once more, replete with deeds of old."

Notwithstanding the fierce invectives hurled by Petrarch against the abuses of the Papacy, he, like Dante, remained to the last a pious son of the Roman Church, and one of his last acts was to found a little oratory for the Virgin Mary.

The most remarkable point of resemblance, however, between these two great Italian poets was the suddenness with which each came under the spell of female beauty, and the romantic devotion with which, in accordance with the spirit of the age, they regarded "the bright particular star," which, from an inaccessible height, shone respectively upon each. Thus, when only nine years of age, a new world opened upon Dante, when at the house of a neighbour, he, for the first time, gazed upon Beatrice, a few months younger than himself; thus also Petrarch, in this twenty-third year, in the church of the Nuns of St. Clara, first gazed upon Laura.

In both, the ideal passion thus awakened was wrought into the texture of their being, and became the inspiring influence of their lives, and both have immortalized, in imperishable verse, the objects of their adoration.

It is interesting, in this connection, to remember the tribute paid by Milton to these two great Italian poets; referring to those authors who are most commended, he says: "Above them all I preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression."

Dante was, however, dowered with a deeper and loftier nature than his successor. In Dante's imagination Beatrice was transfigured into his guardian angel, attending him, step by step, as he ascended from earth to heaven, until at length, upborne upon the wings of poetry and love, he beholds her, in beatific vision, as the spiritualized embodiment of eternal truth.

Petrarch occupies a lower level; in language exquisitely melodious he records the various phases of his passion, during the life-time of his lady-love, and after her decease; "his verses," it has been said, "are spells, which unseal the inmost enchanted fountains of the delight which is in the grief of love. It is impossible to feel them without becoming a portion of that beauty which we contemplate; it were superfluous to explain how the gentleness and the elevation of mind connected

with these sacred emotions can render men more amiable, more generous and wise, and lift them out of the dull vapours of the little world of self."

As the poet of ideal love, Petrarch takes rank among the world's master singers, while, as the scholar, devoting himself with untiring zeal, not only to recovering the lost treasures of classical antiquity, but also to the labour of their transcription, he occupies an unique position, as the pioneer, preparing the way for the revival of learning, which in the following century resulted from the taking of Constantinople by the Turks ; nevertheless, he cannot, like Dante, be regarded as a vital and permanent factor in carrying on the progress of humanity.

ENGLAND.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

1340—1400.

William Langland, about 1332, date of his death unknown.

THE revolt against the spiritual tyranny wielded by the Church of Rome, which, with the progress of civilization, was becoming intolerable, had, as stated above, been unconsciously inaugurated in Italy, in the fourteenth century, by the poet Petrarch. We must now turn to England, where also one of the first efforts was made to emancipate the human mind from the spiritual thralldom of the Mediæval Church. The fourteenth century, memorable, under many aspects, in our national history, is especially noteworthy, as having witnessed the birth of John Wyclif, and Geoffrey Chaucer;—the day-star of the Reformation, and the Poet of the Dawn.

It may not be uninteresting to dwell briefly upon the more salient features of an age of which England's first great poet has, through the medium of his immortal verse, bequeathed to posterity so graphic a delineation. "In 1362 it was ordered that English should be used in courts of law, and in 1363 Parliament was, for the first time, opened by an English speech; Bishops, moreover, began to preach in English, and a few years later, as we learn from a contemporary writer, 'In the year of our Lord 1385, in all the grammar schools of England, children leaveth French, and construeth and learneth in English. Also gentlemen have now much left for to teach their children French?'"

This recognition of English as the language of the whole nation, is a token that the amalgamation between the Norman and Saxon elements in the body politic, a process which had been going on for three hundred years, was approaching its consummation.

The growth of a free yeomanry and the advance of the middle class towards a position of greater social and political consideration, form also striking features of the fourteenth century. This is shown by the more active part taken by the commons in public affairs. "The Knight of the shire," we are told by the historian, "was now finally joined with the Burgess of the town, to form the third estate of the realm; and this union of the trader and the country-gentleman, gave a vigour and a weight to the action of the Commons, which their House could never have acquired, had it remained, as elsewhere, a mere gathering of burgesses."¹

Chivalry, meanwhile, with its love of pageantry and pomp, which, from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, had exerted a refining, a purifying, and an elevating influence alike on manners and on morals, had not completely passed away in Chaucer's time, and receives illustration from his poems. Thus, among his pilgrims,

"A Knight there was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the time that he firste began
To riden out, he loved chevalrie,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curtesie.

.

And though that he was worthy he was wise,
And of his port as meke as is a mayde.
He never yet no vilanie ne sayde
In alle his life, unto no manere wight,
He was a veray parfit gentil Knight."

The foundation of our most illustrious order of Knighthood dates from the reign of Edward III., who, loving the pomp of tournaments, and other showy entertainments, revived the Round Table of King Arthur.

¹ Green's "History of the People of England."

The age was also signalized by the prevalence of gross corruption in the lives of the clergy, coexisting with degrading superstition on the part of the people.

In the midst of this spiritual destitution Wyclif arose, a light shining in a dark place, one of the most noteworthy figures in English history. In his great work, "*De Dominio Divino*," or the Kingdom of God, after laying down the principle that Dominion, in the highest sense, is in God alone, he proceeds to apply it to the individual conscience. "Obedient as each man might be to king or priest, he himself, as a possessor of Dominion, held immediately of God." A theory which, in establishing a direct relation between God and man, swept away the whole basis of a mediating priesthood, the very foundation on which the Mediæval Church was built. His denial in 1381 of the doctrine of transubstantiation, was speedily followed by his rejection of Pardons, Absolutions, Indulgences, Saint-worship, and other practices of the Roman Church. He thus inaugurated the struggle between "sacerdotal usurpation and the rights of the individual conscience," which forms so important a feature in our national history.

Condemned by the University of Oxford, he appealed to the people, sending forth his translation of the Bible, together with sermons and tracts, written in racy English; with a view to their dissemination, he associated with himself a number of humble missionaries, under the title of poor priests. One of these preachers is brought vividly before us by Chaucer, in his exquisite portrait of the poor parson of the town.

If now we turn to Chaucer we shall find much in his personal career, as well as in his poems, significant of the transitional age in which his lot was cast. From early youth he appears to have been attached to the court, first in the service of Prince Lionel, and subsequently in that of the king;—in this position he became saturated with the Trouvère literature of France, characterized by airy lightness, brilliant invention, and felicity of expression, which coloured his earliest works, and which

during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, not only had a predominance in Europe but flourished more at the court of our Anglo-Norman kings than in France itself. This foreign element, engrafted upon a nature intensely English, with its broad humour, shrewd good sense and tender pathos, endowed, moreover, with high poetic genius, produced a poet eminently qualified to reflect in his works the varied features of a curiously complex age.

His missions abroad,¹ in the service of the crown, carried him three times to Italy, thus giving him the opportunity of visiting Genoa, Milan, Florence, and probably Padua;—from the familiarity with which, in his prologue to “*The Clerk’s Tale*,” he speaks of Petrarch, it has been generally supposed that, on the occasion of his visit to the latter city, he made the acquaintance of the Italian poet. Wonderful indeed must have been the effect upon his poetical temperament of the new world of beauty which would be revealed to him in the cities of Italy, where he would gaze with delight upon the works of Italian artists and architects,—including the frescoes of Giotto, and his incomparable master-work, his marble campanile,—surpassing anything of the kind which had been produced elsewhere.

Thus also were opened to him the Italian language and literature, which, coming precisely at the time when he required a higher standard of literary excellence, exercised a powerful and most beneficial influence upon his genius.

Prior to his first visit to Italy, 1372, he had drawn his materials almost exclusively from French sources, his translation of the celebrated “*Roman de la Rose*,” having been one of his earliest productions. It must, however, be borne in mind, that, while translating the works of the French Trouvères, he had maintained his independence, subordinating not unfrequently his foreign model to the requirements of his own creative genius.

Subsequent to his first Italian visit, his poems bear

¹ See “*Life of Chaucer*” by A. W. Ward.

witness to his acquaintance with Petrarch, and also with the "Decameron" of Boccaccio, to which he was largely indebted for the subjects of his tales.

Born about twenty years after the death of Dante, he became a profound student of the great Italian bard, traces of whose influence may be found in the prologue to "The Legende of Goode Women," in "Troilus and Cresseda," "The House of Fame," and also in the "Canterbury Tales."

Thus to the great Florentine poet he was indebted for the beautiful passage in the "Wife of Bath's Tale," wherein he gives his idea of true "gentillesse, as having no connection with external circumstances, being independent of lineage or inherited wealth, and wherein he enforces the truth"

"That he is gentil that doth gentil deeds."

The entire passage, extending for about forty lines, is, as pointed out by Dean Plumptre, a paraphrase, partly, of Purg. vii. 121-122, and partly of the canzone which opens with the words:

"Le dolci rime d'amore ch'io solea."

In the following lines, Chaucer expresses his obligation to his great Italian predecessor.

"Well can the wisē poet of Florence
That Dante hightē, speak of this sentence:
Lo, in such manner of rhyme, is Dante's tale."

In the "Monk's Tale" Chaucer, with touches of exquisite pathos, reproduces the tragedy of Count Ugolino, which he thus concludes:

"Whoso wot here it in a longer wise,
Redeth the grete poete of Itaille,
That hightē Dante, for he can it devise,
From point to point, not a word will he faille."

He also translated the hymn to the Virgin in Par. xxxiii. 1-27.

We cannot be surprised at the profound impression produced upon the mind of the English poet by the Italian literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when we remember that through it he was, for the first time, introduced to literary master-works, written in a modern language, of which, at that period, Italy alone could boast. His experience on first reading the great poem of Dante may be compared to that of Goethe, who tells us that, on first reading a play of Shakespeare, "he felt like a man born blind, suddenly restored to sight." No words, perhaps, could more adequately describe the blended emotions of wonder and delight which must ever accompany the vision of excellence which transcends our highest ideal; and with such feelings a work of such surpassing grandeur as the "*Divina Commedia*," would doubtless be contemplated by Chaucer.

Profound as was Chaucer's admiration for Dante, few contrasts could be more striking than that between his genius and that of the great Florentine poet; this contrast may be illustrated by comparing the inscription placed by him over the gate in his "*Assembly of Fowls*," with that placed by Dante over the gate of Hell, and from which it is imitated.

"Through me men go into the blissful place
Of the heart's heal and deadly woundes' cure;
Through me men go unto the well of Grace,
Where green and lusty May doth ever endure;
This is the way to all good aventure;
Be glad, thou Reader, and thy sorrow off cast,
All open am I, pass in, and speed thee fast!"

It has been suggested by Mr. Lowell that no better inscription can be written on the first page of Chaucer's works.

Dante's exquisite sensibility to the manifold charms of nature was shared, though within narrower limits, by his English compeer, of whom it has been truly said that "he allowed the song of the little birds, the perfume of the flowers, and the fresh verdure of the

English landscape to sink into his very soul," and hence, after the lapse of five centuries, his poetry is still "as fresh as is the month of May." Chaucer's passion for books is second only to his love of nature.

These two strong predilections have found expression in the following characteristic passage from the prologue to the "Legende of Goode Women."

"And as for me, though that I ken but lyte,
On bokës for to rede I me deligte,
And to them give I feyth and ful credence,
And in myn herte have them in reverence,
So hertely, that ther is gamë noon,
That fro my bokës maketh me to goon,
But yt be seldom on the holy day,
Save, certeynly, when that the moneth of May
Is comen, and that I here the foulës synge,
And that the flourës gynnen for to spryng,
Farewell my boke, and my devocioun."

Then follow the beautiful lines in which he tells us

"That of allë the flourës in the mede,
Then love I most these flourës white and rede,
Such as men callen daysyes in the toun."

A passage too long for quotation, but for which all lovers of Nature's "bonnie gem" will be grateful.

Chaucer, like Dante, belongs to the Middle Ages, and accordingly in his poems we find the same intermingling of heterogeneous elements, scriptural, classical, and mediæval, which forms so striking a feature in the "Divina Commedia." His "Canterbury Tales," the poet's last and greatest work, while reflecting as in a mirror the more salient features of the age, bear witness at the same time, to his profound sympathy with humanity, and illustrate his fellow-feeling with all sorts and conditions of men.

His pilgrims, nine-and-twenty in number, drawn from all classes of society, from the knight to the plowman, while faithful portraits of the poet's contemporaries, arrayed in the costume of the fourteenth century, are,

at the same time, so broadly human, that they may be regarded as types of our common humanity.

Chivalry has its representative in the veray parfit gentil knight, together with his son, a yonge squier ;

“Singing he was, or floyting all the day,
He was as freshe, as is the moneth of May ;”

two charming portraits. The yeoman, the knight's sole attendant, is also a noteworthy figure.

“His arwes drouped not with fetheres low,
And in his hond he bare a mighty bowe.”

The Church is represented by a group of figures who strikingly illustrate the worldliness, sensuality, wickedness and greed which characterized the ecclesiastics of the day, and which called forth the indignant protest of Wyclif ;—the monk, the frere, the sompnour, of whom Chaucer gives a frightful picture, and his friend, the pardoner, the seller of papal indulgences,

“His wallet lay before him in his lappe,
Bret-ful of pardon come from Rome all hote ;”—

are evidently portraits drawn from life.

In striking contrast to these representatives of the established religion is the poor parson of the town, doubtless intended for one of Wyclif's poor missionaries, and in whom the poet gives us his ideal of a Christian minister. So beautiful is the picture that I would fain transcribe the whole, but must content myself with giving the few following lines.

“Wide was his parish, and houses far asonder,
But he ne left nought for no rain no thonder,
In sicknesse and in mischief to visite
The ferrest in his parish, mocke and lite,¹
Upon his fete, and in his hand a staf,

¹ High and low.

This noble ensample to his shepe he yaf,
That first he wrought and ofterward he taught.

To drawen folk to heaven, with faireness,
By good example, was his besinesse.

But Christes lore, and his apostles twelve,
He taught, but first he folwed it himselve."

The parson's brother, the plowman, the representative of the labouring classes, is another charming character.

"He wolde thrash, and thereto dike and delve,
For Cristes sake, for every poure wight,
Withouten hire, if it lay in his might."

Worthy to be associated with the parson and his brother, is the Clerk of Oxenford, who, in his love of books, rivals even Chaucer himself.

"For him was lever han at his beedes hed
A twenty bokes, clothed in black or red,
Of Aristotle, and his philosophie,
Than robes riche, or fidel, or sautrie.

Souning in moral vertue was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche."

The Merchant, the Franklen, the Shipman, the Miller, and the Reve, bring vividly before us the middle class, who were gradually becoming a power in the state. The learned professions are represented by a sergeant of the law, and a doctor of phisike, and the fair sex by the Prioress and the good wif of Bathe.

In accordance with the poet's original conception, each pilgrim was to tell two tales, both going and coming; of this plan only about one-fourth was carried out and we accordingly possess only twenty-four tales; these, however, are all so completely in harmony with the varied individualities of the narrators, that they afford ample scope for illustrating the manifold characteristics of the poet's genius; his vivid imagination; his geniality; his

bright joyous temperament; his keen sympathy with nature and humanity, his exuberant humour; and his exquisite pathos.

Among the *Canterbury Tales*, the preference is, I believe, generally accorded to the story of Palamon and Arcite, related by the Knight; and if regard is had to the skilful development of the plot, to the magnificent descriptions, especially of the temples of Venus and of Mars, and to the power of characterization, displayed in the portraiture of the two heroes, this claim to preeminence will probably remain unquestioned.

I cannot but think, however, that, for pathetic charm, the palm must be given to the tales told by the Clerk, and by the Man of Law, wherein, though the barbarity of the circumstances is repugnant to modern feeling, the characters of the two heroines, Grisilde and Coustance, are drawn with such touching delicacy, and are so exquisitely beautiful, that they deserve to take their place beside the noble band of women bequeathed to us by Spenser and by Shakespeare. To dwell upon these and many other charming tales, related by the pilgrims, would detain us too long; suffice it is to say that "they take in the whole range of the poetry of the middle ages; the legend of the saint, the romance of the knight, the wonderful fables of the traveller, the coarse tale of common life, the love story, the allegory, the satirical lay and the apologue."

Chaucer may be truly characterized, to borrow the words of Mr. Lowell, as "the prince of story-tellers;" "his best tales," he continues, "run on like one of our inland rivers, sometimes hastening a little and turning upon themselves, in eddies that dimple, without retarding the current; sometimes loitering smoothly, while here and there, a quiet thought, a tender feeling, a pleasant image, a golden-hearted verse, opens quietly as a water-lily, to float on the surface without breaking it into a ripple."

It seems strange that we should find, in the poems of Chaucer, so few allusions to the popular insurrections

which form so striking and so terrible a feature in Richard II.'s reign. Notwithstanding this omission, the following passage from "The Persones Tale" affords satisfactory evidence that his sympathies were with the poor and the oppressed :

"The prudent shuld live benignely with the thral. Those that thou clepest thy thralles, ben Goddes peple ; for humble folk ben Cristes frendes ; they ben contubernial with the Lord, thy king.

"Thinke also, that of swiche seed as cherles springen, of swiche seed springen lordes ; as well may the cherl be saved as the Lord. The same deth that taketh the cherl, swich deth taketh the Lord. Wherefore, I rede,¹ do right so with thy cherl as thou woldest that thy Lord did with thee, if thou were in his plight. Every sinful man is a cherl to sinne ; I rede thee, thou Lord, that thou reule thee in swiche wise, that thy cherles rather love thee than drede thee. I wote wel, that there is degree above degree, as reson is, and skill is,² that men do hir devoir, ther as it is due ; but certes, extortion, and despit of your underlinges, is dampnable."

This passage reminds us of Chaucer's contemporary, William Langland, who, in his vision of "Piers the Plowman," in which, like Chaucer, he introduces a variety of typical characters, also enjoins the Knight no longer to misuse the poor ; "Though he be thine underling here," he says, almost in the words of Chaucer, "it well may pass in Heaven that he be worthier set, and with more bliss than thou."

Very striking is the contrast between Chaucer, familiar with the life of courts, and who loves to delineate the brighter aspects of English life, and "the gaunt poet of the poor," "who depicts with terrible fidelity the darker and sterner aspects of the time," his desire to ameliorate the condition of the lower orders, and to raise them to a higher level, social and religious, being the inspiring purpose of his poem. Very striking also is the visionary character of his genius ; thus as the poem advances, his

¹ Advise.

² It is meet.

ideal Reformer, Piers the plowman, becomes identified with self-sacrificing love, in the person of the Good Samaritan, and finally with Christ himself.¹

Like Wyclif, Langland denounces with indignant scorn, the corruption of the Church, and of its functionaries; their pride and luxury, their hypocrisy, their pitiless extortion, and utter want of charity towards the poor.

The visionary, however, according to Dean Milman, is no disciple, no precursor of Wyclif, in his broader religious views. . . . "He acquiesces seemingly with unquestioning faith in the creed and in the usages of the Church. It is in his intense absorbing moral feeling, that he is beyond his age; with him outward observances are but hollow shows, mockeries, hypocrisies, without the inward power of religion."²

He brings vividly before the mental eye the sufferings of the lower orders, the victims of oppression and injustice; ill-housed and ill-fed, and often in the direful grasp of hunger and of want. It is not surprising that a poem, thus giving expression to the sentiments of the million, should have attained immediate and widespread popularity. How urgently called for was this appeal for justice and mercy on the part of Chaucer and Langland, will be recognized when we remember the passion of revenge which animated the proprietary classes at the close of the peasants' war. The intensity of this passion appears from the answer returned by Parliament to the question of enfranchisement, submitted to it by the Royal Council in Nov. 1381. "If you desire to enfranchise and set at liberty the said serfs," so ran the Royal Message, "by your common consent, as the King has been informed that some of you desire, he will consent to your prayer." "No thought of compromise influenced the land-owners in their reply." "Their serfs," they said, "were their goods, and the king could not take their goods from them but by their

¹ W. W. Skeat.

² Quoted by the Rev. Walter W. Skeat, M.A., in the Introduction to his edition of William Langland's poem.

own consent." "And this consent," they ended, "we have never given, and never will give, were we all to die in one day." They forbade the child of any tiller of the soil to be apprenticed in a town. They prayed the king to ordain, "that no bondman or bondwoman shall place their children at school, as has been done, so as to advance their children in the world, by their going into the Church." As a protest against this class hatred, as unchristian as it was unjust, thus manifested by the owners towards the tillers of the soil, Poetry, true to her high vocation, as the spiritual teacher of humanity, proclaimed, through her immortal bard, the equality of all men in the presence of great spiritual realities. This truth, involved in the very idea of a pilgrimage, which brought together, on terms of equality, individuals of every social grade, from the knight to the plowman, lies at the very root of the "Canterbury Tales," thus proclaiming the lesson which the poet doubtless intended to enforce,—namely, that human life is itself a pilgrimage to the unseen Beyond, where justice will be impartially administered alike to lord and churl.

With this inadequate notice of their respective works, I must bid farewell to the Poet of the Dawn, and his contemporary, William Langland.

ITALY.

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO.

1474—1533.

IN the history of human progress the fifteenth, with the earlier decades of the sixteenth century, constitutes an ever memorable epoch, having in Italy witnessed the Renaissance, which, due to the indefatigable labours of Italian scholars, whose enthusiastic zeal had succeeded in disinterring the master-works of classical antiquity, had given to the world new ideals, in the domain alike of poetry, philosophy, and art. This devotion to the study of Pagan literature, which appears for a time to have exerted a demoralizing influence upon Italian society, was accompanied simultaneously by a remarkable revival of Italian literature and art. In Germany the same period gave birth to the Reformation, which, by emancipating men's minds from the thralldom of the Mediæval Church, opened to their energies a new and boundless career.

In England, meanwhile, a considerable interval elapsed before the new learning made itself felt; men's minds, in that country, being preoccupied with domestic affairs, more especially with the Wars of the Roses, and their manifold results.

Hence, before continuing our survey of English poetry, it will be necessary to return to Italy, where the poetical successors of Dante and Petrarch bear witness to the new world which had been recently opened to them by the Renaissance.

The year 1474, precisely one hundred years after the death of Petrarch, witnessed the birth of Ludovico Ariosto, Italy's third great poet, "whose 'Orlando Furioso' embodies all the characteristics of the Renaissance, which, in the previous century, had been inaugurated by his predecessor."

"The 'Orlando Furioso,' " it has been said, "gave full and final expression to the Cinque Cento, just as the 'Divina Commedia' uttered the last word of the Middle Ages."

Revelling in the new world which had been opened to them by the discovery of the Classics, and endowed with the sensuous temperament and realistic genius of the south, the poets and artists of the Renaissance, in their recoil from the ascetic tendencies, and other deadening influences of Mediævalism, devoted themselves with passionate ardour to the worship of the Beautiful, as manifested in external form, in the perfection of which they found the realization of their ideal. The literature of the so-called Golden Age, "seems to have been produced for and by men who had lost their ethical and political conscience, and had enthroned an æsthetical conscience in its room." "Of this age, devoid alike of moral earnestness, political enthusiasm, and spiritual passion, Ariosto, the consummate artist, was," we are told, "the best interpreter."

While recognizing that chivalry with its marvels and its magic, its love of peril and adventure, was a thing of the past, he received his theme from Boiardo, who, in his "Orlando Innamorato," following the Mediæval romances, has recounted in verse the marvellous adventures of Charlemagne and his Paladins, in their encounters with the Moors, and wherein, in accordance with the spirit of Chivalry, the fair sex, preeminently the charming Angelica, play a conspicuous part. The story of Orlando, as left by Boiardo, was adopted by Ariosto, as a framework whereon to construct a poetical master-work, and rarely has the power of genius been more strikingly displayed than in the inexpressible charm

with which the ancient tales of chivalry and romance are invested by his magic touch.

With his supreme pictorial faculty, with his marvellous imaginative power, with wit and wisdom, with knowledge of men and women, and with occasional pathos, he arranges a series of tableaux vivants, which succeed each other with endless variety, and upon which the spectator gazes, as in a theatre, with never-ceasing astonishment, amusement and delight, and occasionally, it must be confessed, with feelings of a very different character.

The amazing popularity of the "*Orlando Furioso*," is attested by Bernardo Tasso, the father of Torquato, according to whom, "within a few weeks after its appearance, there was no one in Italy, neither learned man nor artisan, no youth, or maiden, young, or old, who had not read it through more than once; passengers in the streets, sailors in their boats, and virgins in their chambers, sung for their disport the stanzas of Ariosto."

A supreme master of his craft, Ariosto takes rank among the immortal singers, but not among the inspired teachers of the world.

TORQUATO TASSO.

1544—1595.

INDISSOLUBLY associated with Ariosto is another Italian poet, Torquato Tasso, whose career so strikingly illustrates some of the more salient features of his age, that a slight sketch of his tragic story may form a not inappropriate prelude to a brief notice of this immortal poet. He may be regarded as representing, in his writings, the later, as Ariosto had represented, under some of its aspects, the earlier, portion of the sixteenth century, and also as bearing witness to the great Catholic revival, which formed so striking a feature of the age,

and which may be viewed under a twofold aspect. As a revolt against the paganism of the Renaissance, with its flagrant licentiousness and depravity, it doubtless tended to raise the moral tone of Italian society, which, owing to a variety of causes, had become frightfully corrupt.

At the same time, true to her traditional policy, the Church, by the establishment of the Inquisition, and other agencies, aimed at paralyzing all freedom of thought, and thus placed herself in opposition to the progressive tendencies of the age.

Among the promoters of the Catholic revival, under its higher aspects, a prominent place must be assigned to San Carlo Barromeo, who, "by his life and instructions, and unwearied labours, had succeeded," we are told, "in reviving the nearly extinguished spark of religion."¹

That great prelate had established or reopened, either directly, or by his influence and authority, numerous schools and universities, thronged with students from all parts of the Christian world. Among these universities, that of Padua held the highest rank, and there, in his eighteenth year, Torquato Tasso was entered by his father, Bernardo, as a student of law.

Following, however, the bent of his genius, he devoted himself with passionate fervour to the study of philosophy, poetry, and mathematics, and during his first year's residence, having already produced an epic poem, "Rinaldo," he conceived, and in part executed, the grand design of his "Gerusalemme Liberata," some cantos of which, on leaving the university, he carried with him to Ferrara.

One of the most remarkable features of Italian society, in the latter half of the sixteenth century, was the anxiety manifested by the princes and nobles to attract to their courts men in any way distinguished in war or in scholarship, in science, poetry, or art. Among the princely families who prided themselves upon their

¹ "Life of Torquato Tasso," by Dean Milman.

hereditary patronage of genius, and upon the splendour and magnificence of their court, the D'Este of Ferrara were second only to the Medici of Florence. At Ferrara, under the auspices of Alphonso I., Ariosto had produced his "*Orlando Furioso*;" it is not surprising, therefore, that Torquato Tasso, already celebrated as a poet and distinguished for his varied accomplishments, should have been cordially welcomed by Alphonso II., and by his accomplished sisters, Lucreza and Leonora, when, among the gentlemen of Cardinal Luigi D'Este, Alphonso's younger brother, he arrived at the Ferrarese court, A.D. 1565.

Honoured by the friendship of these distinguished personages, and under the stimulating and inspiring influences of their society, Tasso devoted himself with renewed energy to the composition of his epic.

In 1570 he accompanied his patron, Luigi D'Este, to Paris, where he remained two years; thence he repaired to Rome, and on his return to Ferrara in 1572, he again applied himself to his great work, which he brought to a conclusion in 1574:

Anxious for its perfection, he resolved to submit it to the judgment of the most distinguished scholars of the day, and for this purpose he visited Padua, Bologna, and Rome. At length, having derived from foreign criticism all the benefit he could hope for, he returned to Ferrara, determined that the publication of his poem should be no longer delayed. Meanwhile, its appearance was looked forward to with intense interest throughout the whole of Italy. Alas! both the poet and his compatriots were doomed to bitter disappointment. Into the vexed question as to the causes which led to Tasso's imprisonment in the Hospital of Santa Anna, the bedlam of Ferrara, and to Alphonso's prolonged and implacable hostility, I must not enter. Assuredly, however, in the wide range of literature it would be difficult to find a more splendid example of mind triumphing over adverse circumstances than that of Tasso, amid the ghastly surroundings of that dread abode, finding solace and relief in the exercise of his creative genius. Several of his

most interesting "dialogues," many poems of great beauty and pathos, together with innumerable letters, having been composed during his captivity.

In 1580, during the third year of his imprisonment, the publication, in a mutilated form, of his "*Jerusalemme*" inflicted a cruel wound upon the poet's sensitive nature. Other more perfect editions, however, soon followed in rapid succession, and in the course of six months Tasso's great poem was reprinted seven times, six in Italy and once in France. "As soon as it appeared, the demand was prodigious; it was impossible to meet it." "It was read by the shepherd, the boatman, and the gondolier; by the brigand and the merchant; by the brave cavalier and the fair maiden; by the scholar; by nobles and princes and their stately dames."

Meanwhile the poet, whose genius had awakened this universal enthusiasm, haunted by the dread of life-long captivity, emaciated and suffering from premature old age, was immured within the walls of his living tomb. Great was the commiseration awakened by the sufferings of so renowned a captive, and strenuous were the efforts made to endeavour to secure his release.

The Pope, the Emperor, the Grand Duke and Duchess of Tuscany, cardinals, princes, dukes, together with Bergamo, the birthplace of Bernardo Tasso, all interceded with Alphonso in Tasso's behalf; for a long time he continued obdurate; at length, however, he relented, and finally the order came for the captive's release; and thus, after seven years, ten months, and some days of imprisonment in a madhouse, Tasso came forth again into the world.

I must not follow the poet during his subsequent wanderings, except to notice the brilliant ovation of which he was the object at Florence, when the Grand Duke and Duchess, and all the literary world of Florence, vied with the people in paying homage to the poet whose genius had added new lustre to the poetic fame with which Italy had already been invested by Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto.

The touching incidents connected with the death of Tasso are in harmony with the poetic interest which attaches to his career, from its commencement to its close. It appears from his letters that at one period of his life he earnestly desired a triumph similar to that which Petrarch had enjoyed, when in the Capitol, amid the princes and nobles of Italy, he had received from the Senate a laurel crown; but when at length this honour was accorded him, when a day was assigned for this splendid pageant, when prelates, princes, nobles, professors, and students, were thronging from all quarters into the city to witness the triumph,—a change had come over his spirit. His long sufferings had weaned his thoughts from earth; he felt that the hand of death was upon him, and hoped, to use his own words,—“to go crowned, not as a poet to the Capitol, but with glory as a saint to Heaven.” On the eve of the day appointed for the ceremony, he expired at the Monastery of Saint Onofrio, April 25, 1595; and his remains, habited in a magnificent toga, and adorned with a laurel crown, were carried in procession through the streets of Rome.

Special interest attaches to one of Tasso's latest poems, entitled “The Seven Days, or the Universe Created,” from its having, as has been imagined, suggested to Milton some passages in his description of the creation in “Paradise Lost;” be that as it may, the English poet was doubtless familiar with the works of his great Italian predecessor. We can well imagine the intense interest with which Tasso's melancholy story, as related by his friend and biographer, John Baptista Manso, would be listened to by Milton, when, during his sojourn in Italy, he was entertained by the same accomplished nobleman, then in his seventy-ninth year, who, fifty years before, had cherished the Italian poet in his declining years, and to whom Tasso had inscribed his book on “Friendship.”

How deep was the impression produced by Tasso on another English poet, his contemporary, Spenser, will appear from a very slight comparison between the ad-

ventures of Sir Guyon and the Palmer, in the second book of the "*Faerie Queene*," canto xii., and those of the two knights dispatched to discover Rinaldo, and to lead him back from the enchantments of Armida to the Christian camp. ("*Jerusalem Delivered*," cantos xv. and xvi.)

In both poems we have the sea voyage; the disembarkation; the furious beasts subdued by the magic wand; in both we have a description of the Naiads disporting themselves in the crystal flood, and of the palace gates, adorned with life-like sculptures, while the celebrated stanzas, picturing Armida's garden of delight reappear, almost literally translated, in Spenser's "*Bowre of Blisse*."

Though cast in a classic mould, being constructed, with regard to form, after the model of the "*Iliad*," and though recalling, in occasional stanzas, passages borrowed from the master-works of classical antiquity, the "*Jerusalem Delivered*" is essentially a Christian poem, and is, at the same time, pervaded by the spirit of Mediæval chivalry and romance, thus blending, in one harmonious whole, elements derived from three independent sources of poetic inspiration.

It must, however, be confessed that the romantic element predominates, the larger portion of the poem being devoted to the love adventures of the principal Christian warriors, thus affording the opportunity for introducing a series of interesting female characters, Clorinda and Armida, Gildeppe, Erminia, and Sofronia, among whom supreme interest attaches to the two former, from their relation to the two prime heroes of the poem, Tancred and Rinaldo.

The prominent part assigned to Armida, the fascinating sorceress, whose outward attractions are unaccompanied by any noble qualities of mind or heart; more especially her relation, at the close of the poem, to Rinaldo, the Christian warrior, may perhaps be regarded as the least satisfactory feature of the poem; while the numerous episodes, charming in themselves, tend to

divert attention from its central motive, the capture, namely, of the Holy City. Thus, in unity of structure, the "Jerusalem Delivered" compares unfavourably with the "Iliad," while in power of characterization also, the Italian poet must yield the palm to Homer, whose creations, like those of Shakespeare, breathe the very breath of life. Nevertheless, the heroes of the Modern Epic, especially the leader Godfrey, a truly noble character, are inspired by sentiments and swayed by motions of a higher order than those known to the warriors of antiquity, and bear witness to the new ideas and emotions introduced into the world by the union of chivalry with the religion of the Cross. In illustration of this remark, I may appeal to the glorification, in Tasso's heroes, of the preeminently Christian virtues, purity, humility, and self-sacrifice, combined with religious enthusiasm, knightly valour and chivalric love.

With regard to the subject of the poem, none could have been more admirably chosen to meet the requirements of the Epic bard than that of the "Jerusalem Delivered." Two hostile hosts, the Christians and the Infidels, representing respectively the antagonistic principles of civilization and barbarism, and embracing the whole known world,—the peoples of Europe on one side, and of Asia and Africa on the other,—are brought face to face, in deadly conflict. The cruel persecution of the Christian pilgrims, at Jerusalem, consequent upon the conquest of Syria by the Turks, about the middle of the eleventh century, stirred the heart of Europe to its depths, and prompted that magnificent outburst of enthusiastic zeal which carried the crusaders to the East, to rescue from the grasp of the Infidel the Holy Sepulchre, and other localities consecrated by association with the Founder of their faith.

How completely Tasso threw himself into the passionate enthusiasm which animated the crusading host, appears from the transport of joy with which he represents them as saluting the Holy City, when after their

long and perilous career, it suddenly burst upon their sight, together with the sentiments of heartfelt contrition, by which their first rapture was succeeded, when, casting aside plume and crest, and all outward appliances of splendour, and pouring forth their penitential tears, they press forward, like a company of pilgrims, with naked feet, along the hallowed ground.

Light is thrown upon the immense enthusiasm which greeted the appearance of the "Jerusalem Delivered," when we remember that, notwithstanding the lapse of five centuries since the events there celebrated, the mingled feelings of hatred and dismay occasioned by the advance of the Turks, were as rife in the sixteenth as in the eleventh century. Though the battle-field was changed, the war between the Christians and the Turks was waged as fiercely as ever; the dread of the Ottoman power, which possessed the whole of Eastern Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, having been intensified by the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1452.

Bernardo Tasso, the poet's father, had attended the Emperor Charles V. on his celebrated expedition to abolish piracy, when he defeated an army of sixty thousand Moors and Turks, destroyed their numerous fleet and liberated from miserable slavery twenty thousand Christian captives, whom he sent back to their several homes. Accordingly, in narrating the exploits of his heroes against the dreaded foe, culminating in the humiliation of the Infidel and in the temporary triumph of the Cross, the poet might confidently rely upon the enthusiastic sympathy of his readers, which is one essential element of success.

The "Jerusalem Delivered," notwithstanding its immense popularity, does not entitle its author to a place beside Dante, among the world's supreme poets. Nevertheless, appealing, as it does, to the imagination and to the highest sentiments of humanity; glorifying, through its immortal verse, the great principles of reverence and humility, and exhibiting, in its principal personages, with

some few exceptions, noble types of Christian character, its tendency is to elevate and to idealize human life and thus to fulfil the highest function of poetry.

Accordingly Tasso, like his contemporary Spenser, may be enrolled not only among the world's great poets, but also among the world's great teachers, and it is an interesting fact that his "Jerusalem" has received the highest possible tribute which could be paid to its merits, "by being translated into every civilized tongue, not only of Europe, but also into Turkish, Arabic, and Chinese."

ENGLAND.

EDMUND SPENSER.

1552—1598.

If, on returning to England, at the time of Chaucer's death, we traverse, in imagination, a period of rather more than one hundred and fifty years, we enter upon another great epoch in our national history, known as the Elizabethan age. During the fifteenth century, the literary history of England presents a dreary blank; Chaucer's poetical revival, which gave such glorious promise, had been arrested by the Wars of the Roses, which had deluged England with blood.

It might almost seem as if the Muse of Britain, scared by the tumult of battle, which prevailed in the southern portion of the Island, had taken refuge in the north, where a series of poets, including James the First of Scotland, Dunbar, Douglas, and Sir David Lindsay, together with the ballad-writers, "the minstrels of the Border," continued from generation to generation to transmit the light kindled by "the Poet of the Dawn."

The darkness which had brooded over England during the fifteenth and the earlier decades of the sixteenth century, was partially dispelled by the appearance at the Court of Henry VIII., of Sir Thomas Wyatt, a distinguished statesman and poet, who, with his friend, the Earl of Surrey, succeeded in infusing new life into the poetry of England, enfeebled by the continued imitation of French models. How highly these two distinguished

men were esteemed by their contemporaries appears from the following extract, which bears witness also to their deep indebtedness to the poets of Italy. "In the latter end of the same king's reign" (Henry VIII.), writes Puttenham, an author of the sixteenth century, "Sprög up a new company of courtly makers, of whom Sir Thomas Wyatt, the elder, and Henry, Earle of Surrey, were the two chieftains, who, having travelled in Italie, and there tasted the sweet and stately measures and stile of the Italian Poesie, as novices newly crept out of the schooles of Dante, Ariosto, and Petrarch, they greatly polished our rude and homely manër of vulgar Poesie from that it had bene before, and for that cause may justly be sayd the first reformers of our English meetre and stile." Great as is the boon conferred by Wyatt and Surrey upon English literature by the introduction of the sonnet, and great as is our obligation to the latter for having, in his translation of the "*Æneid*," originated blank verse, they are especially noteworthy as having inaugurated a new epoch in our literature, an epoch, memorable in the literary history, not of England only, but of the world.

In Italy, meanwhile, as we have seen, the work inaugurated by Petrarch and Boccaccio, had been consummated by their successors, and the Renaissance had been crowned by the appearance of the "*Orlando Furioso*" of Ariosto, and somewhat later by that of the "*Gerusalemme Liberata*" of Tasso.

While the genius of Italy was manifesting itself in these splendid achievements, Germany had witnessed the Reformation, which, accomplished under the auspices of Luther, had ushered in a new epoch of European history, while the religious wars in France, culminating in the massacre of St. Bartholomew, had stirred the heart of England to its depths.

The literary activity of Italy, and the religious movements in Germany and France, were not without their effect upon England, and before dwelling upon the poetry of the Elizabethan Age, it may be desirable to notice briefly

a few of the more characteristic features of the period, which we shall find faithfully mirrored in its literature.

Through the religious revolutions of the previous reigns, with their unexpected vicissitudes, and their heroic martyrdoms, the prolonged struggle against Romanism, inaugurated by Wyclif, had finally triumphed. Religion, freed from the despotic yoke of Rome, and appealing with her open Bible to the national heart, met with an enthusiastic response. New worlds, both in the Eastern and Western hemispheres were being opened to the enterprise of Europe; men's imaginations were enriched by hearing from travellers of the innumerable races of mankind, inhabiting the most distant regions of the globe, and differing from each other in appearance, in customs, and in laws. The master-works of classical antiquity, brought to light by the scholars of Italy, had been introduced into England; some of these, through the medium of translation, were widely known, as was also the contemporary literature of Europe, especially that of Italy and Spain, while, at the same time, men's minds were startled by the publication of the Copernican theory, which revolutionized their conception of the heavens, and which, at this period, was expounded for the first time at Oxford, by Giordano Bruno.

The spirit of chivalry, not yet extinct, found its representative in Sir Philip Sidney, of whom it has been justly said that "he combined the wisdom of a grave councillor, with the romantic chivalry of a knight-errant;" while Sir Walter Raleigh, with his many-sided genius, distinguished not only for his courage and adventurous daring exhibited both by land and sea, but remarkable also as a scholar, historian, and poet, concentrated in his own person the leading characteristics of the epoch.

The splendour of the victory achieved over the Spanish Armada, raised the spirit of nationality, which, in the fourteenth century, had appeared as a feeble germ, into a proud consciousness of national independence and as the presiding genius of England, in its sense of this newly

acquired freedom, security and strength, Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen, was regarded by her subjects with feelings of passionate loyalty.

It would indeed have been wonderful if such an epoch had not found appropriate expression in poetry, and accordingly the Elizabethan age is recognized as a period of poetical activity, seldom, if ever, equalled in the history of literature. During the troubled times which intervened between the death of Chaucer and the accession of Elizabeth, no great singer had been heard in England; the voice of the elder bard, however, still sounded from the distant past;—three poets of the Elizabethan age, Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, and Michael Drayton, having borne emphatic testimony to their high appreciation of his genius. At length the prolonged silence was to come to an end.

Foremost in the quire of Elizabethan singers was Edmund Spenser, in whom we hail Chaucer's worthy successor to the poetic throne. As the inventor of the Spenserian stanza, with its rich harmonies, and wonderful variety of cadence,—were that his sole achievement—he would deserve the lasting gratitude of all true lovers of poetry.¹ This feeling of gratitude should be enhanced, when we remember that, at one time, under the influence of Sir Philip Sidney, Spenser appears to have been converted to the scheme of so-called “Artificial versifying,” which aimed at banishing rhyme as barbarous, and at imposing upon English verse the laws and rules of classical metre. In accordance with these rules, he not only made attempts at English Hexameters and Sapphics, he also composed nine plays, named after the nine muses, which were hailed with delight by the advocates of the new scheme, but of which all traces have been lost. Fortunately, Spenser's genius triumphed eventually over the literary pedantry of the day. He was the first to reveal, in perfection, the musical resources of the English language; the melody of his versification is

¹ See the “History of Elizabethan Literature” by George Saintsbury.

wonderful; "It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation." What the great Italian trio, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio had been to Chaucer, their illustrious successors, Ariosto and Tasso, were to Spenser. The "Faerie Queene" as he himself avows, was written in emulation of Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso," while his manifold obligations to Tasso, with whose genius he was in far closer sympathy, are manifest to every student of the "Gerusalemme Liberata," several stanzas of which he has transferred to his own poem. A few verses of the "Faerie Queene," evidently suggested by parallel passages in the "Divina Commedia," bear witness also to his familiarity with Dante, his obligations to whom are however far slighter than to the two later Italian Poets.

It is interesting to find, as showing his early familiarity with the Italian language, that among the productions of his boyhood, published under another name in 1569, are translations of some of Petrarch's sonnets.

In 1580 appeared "The Shepherd's Calendar," dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney, the excellence of which was immediately recognized, and which won for the anonymous author the title of the New Poet, who was compared favourably with Virgil, and who, it was hoped, might take rank with Chaucer.

Written in conformity with the fashion of the period, the poem is eminently artificial, representing the world as a pastoral scene, wherein the men and women, including Queen Elizabeth, Henry VIII., Anna Boleyn, and others, figure as shepherds and shepherdesses, the poet himself appearing as Colin Clout.

This first essay of the poet's genius was eclipsed by his greater work, the "Faerie Queene," wherein, as in a magic mirror, we see reflected the marvellously varied and apparently incongruous elements which were strangely intermingled in the national life of the period: its loyalty, its patriotism, its religious fervour, its passionate

love of adventure and romance, its sympathy with the spirit of the Renaissance which blended the gods and goddesses of classical antiquity with the elves, fairies, dwarfs, giants, gnomes, and other fantastic beings of Celtic and Scandinavian mythology. With these features of the Elizabethan age, Spenser combined the chivalry of "the antique tymes," which he dearly loved, and to which he has paid many a noble tribute in his "Faerie Queene."

In an age saturated with marvels and adventures, no poetic dream, how remote soever from ordinary experience, could transcend belief.

Dominating these various elements, and bringing them into harmony, was the intense religious and moral earnestness characteristic of the poet and of the Puritan section of the community, which was rapidly growing in numbers and in influence.

The poet's sympathy with Puritanism is shown by his bitter hatred of Catholicism, personified in his poem as "the false Duessa of Rome;" this archfoe of the Red Cross Knight, the symbol of holiness, also typifies Elizabeth's rival, Mary, Queen of Scots, while Elizabeth herself figures, not only as the Faerie Queene, but also as "Gloriana, the Empress of all nobleness,—Belphœbe, the princess of all sweetness and beauty,—Britomart, the armed votaress of all purity, and Mercilla, the lady of all compassion and grace."

In Spenser's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, wherein he expounds the intention and meaning of his poem, he tells us that "the general end of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person." As the framework of his poem he chose the history of King Arthur, "in whom he laboured to pourtray, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private moral virtues, as Aristotle hath devised;" "the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes; which, if I find to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encouraged to frame the other part of pollicke virtues in his person after that he came to be king."

It thus appears that Spenser, like Chaucer, executed little more than a fourth part of his plan, as originally conceived. The twelve moral virtues which were to unite in Arthur were, in Spenser's allegorical poem, to be embodied in twelve knights, each of whom was to be the hero of a separate story; thus in the first three books, the Red Cross Knight, Sir Guyon, and the heroine Britomart, are symbols respectively of Holiness, of Temperance, and of Chastity, while the three books subsequently published, treat of Friendship, of Justice, and of Courtesy. Ten years after the poet's death, appeared two cantos of "*Mutabilitie*," being a fragment of the lost second part.

Among the most striking characteristics of Spenser's genius, in addition to his intense moral and religious earnestness, we may note his passionate love of the beautiful which he regards, in all its forms, material and spiritual, as the symbol and manifestation of celestial beauty, and his intense feeling for which finds illustration in his portraiture of human beings, and in his descriptions alike of natural scenery and of works of art.

This feeling for beauty combines with his wonderful descriptive power to render the "*Faerie Queene*" a magnificent gallery filled with exquisite pictures of marvellous variety. "He makes one think always of Venice," says Mr. Lowell, "and as in Venice you swim in a gondola from Gian Bellini to Titian, and from Titian to Tintoret, so in him, where other cheer is wanting, the gentle sway of his measure, like the rhythmical impulse of the oar, floats you lulling along from picture to picture."

What distinguishes him, however, preeminently from most other poets is his inexhaustible imagination. As with the stroke of an enchanter's wand he transports us, mentally, into an ideal realm, remote from this work-a-day world, illumined by a magic gleam "that never was on land or sea," and peopled by allegorical personages and fantastic shapes, into whom he breathes the breath of life, and who play their parts like living beings, native to the scenes of enchantment of which they are the

denizens. Yet, strange to say, this ideal realm is no other than the England of the Elizabethan age, and the visionary beings by whom it is peopled, paladins and squires, damsels and peerless dames, are not merely impersonations of moral qualities; they also represent the leading men and women of the period, many of whom can still be identified. That this blending of the ideal and the actual was contemplated by the poet, appears from the lines addressed by him to Queen Elizabeth:

“And thou, O fairest princess under sky,
In this fair mirror mayst behold thy face,
And thine own realms in land of Faerie.”

It must be confessed, that the poetic effect is occasionally marred by this identification of his magnificent ideal creations with living individualities, not always worthy of the honour thus conferred upon them, a discovery which painfully breaks the spell wherewith the genius of the poet had entranced us.

Among the imperishable creations of his genius wherewith he has enriched the imagination of men for all time, the first place ought perhaps to be assigned to Una, “the lovely ladie with the milkewhite lamb,” the symbol not only of Truth, which lies at the root of all true nobleness, but also of purity, of humility, and steadfast allegiance to duty. Another of her attributes is courage, resting upon her unswerving reliance upon divine guidance and protection. Very significant is the divine radiance which emanated from her countenance, and which, on the removal of her veil, “wherewith her heavenly beautie she did hide,” shone forth with surpassing lustre. Not only did her heavenly beautie overawe the simple wood-gods, it also subdued the ramping lyon, and transformed the king of beasts into her diligent and faithful servitor.

“O how can beautie maister the most strong,
And simple truth subdue avenging wrong.”

“Una’s beauty,” it has been said, “is an exquisite

symbol of that higher beauty of which the peculiar quality is a penetrating radiance; it illuminates all that comes into its presence; it is a beam from the divine fount of life; it lifts up the soul of man out of the mire of this world; it pierces him with a sacred joy; it animates him to pure and passionate endeavour!"

The following lines, which have become household words, convey an exquisite picture of the lovely ladie, when

"She on the grass her dainty limbs did lay,
In secret shadow, far from all men's sight.

. Her angel's face,
As the great eye of heaven, shyned bright,
And made a sunshine in the shady place;
Did never mortal eye behold such heavenly grace."

The Red Cross Knight has been sent forth to wage deadly war against Duessa, the symbol of falsehood and illusion, whose treachery and guile, before his final triumph, work him doleful bale. It is in her relation to her champion that the unique beauty of Una's character manifests itself. "Throughout the poem," it has been said,¹ "although Una is so young, so tender, so mild, while the knight is stout and bold, there is a certain protectiveness on her part towards him, yet this is united in such a way with gentle, fervid loyalty and trust, that it seems to imply no consciousness of superiority."

Time would fail were I to follow, through all its windings, the story of their adventures. Suffice it to say that, after his liberation from the durance vile in which he is held by the "gyant Orgolio," he is conducted by Una to the house of holiness, one of the most beautiful of the poet's creations, and where he is duly prepared for the accomplishment of his heaven-appointed task.

Then follows the terrible conflict with the dragon,

¹ "Cornhill Magazine," June, 1879.

from which he issues triumphant, and which typified the struggle then, as was supposed, being waged, not only in England but throughout Christendom, between heavenly truth, freed from superstition, on the one side, and deadly error, embodied in the Church of Rome, on the other. The dragon being slain, the parents of Una are liberated from the thralldom in which they have long been held, and in their palace the knight and Una are joined in wedlock by her aged sire.

Several other of Spenser's heroines are very noble creations, and deserve to be associated with Una; of such are the twin sisters Belphœbe and Amoret; Belphœbe, the gallant huntress, who, Diana-like, loves to quell the fierce beasts of the forest, yet who yields at length to the gentler passion, and Amoret, who is found by her lover in the temple of Venus, and who may be described as the soul of love itself. Among the contributions of poetry to our galaxy of ideal women, there are few nobler than Britomart, "splendid in womanly beauty, and grand in her heroic courage," whom Spenser has chosen as his knight of chastity; while of a very different character, but very lovely, is sweet Pastorella, who, in her girlish simplicity and grace, reminds us of Perdita.

Among these gracious "beings of the mind," however, I must not linger, nor must I dwell upon the various moral and spiritual truths embodied in Spenser's great master-work. In accordance with my prime object in this hasty sketch, to mark, namely, the successive stages in human progress, not only as indicated in the works of the great poets, but to the attainment of which they have themselves contributed, I will call attention to one feature of the Elizabethan age, which is strikingly illustrated in the "*Faerie Queene*," wherein, to quote the words of Dean Church, to whom I am largely indebted for the preceding remarks, "Spenser has brought out, in its various aspects, a form of character which was then just coming on the stage of the world, and which has played a great part in it since." It must be remem-

bered that, in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh before alluded to, wherein he expounds the meaning of his poem, he mentions that his prime aim was to exhibit, in the largest sense of the word, his conception of the perfect gentleman.

Dante and Chaucer, it is true, had both proclaimed that true gentellesse is independent alike of birth and of hereditary wealth; "That he is gentle who does gentle deeds," nevertheless, "the character, as a whole, was new in the world." "In the days of Elizabeth it was beginning to fill a large place in English life. It was formed amid the increasing cultivation of the nation, the increasing varieties of public service, the awakening responsibilities to duty, and calls to self-command." "A nobleman might have in him the making of a gentleman: but it was the man himself of whom the gentleman was made. Great birth, even great capacity, were not enough; there must be added a new delicacy of conscience, a new appreciation of what is beautiful and worthy of honour, a new measure of the strength and nobleness of self-control, of devotion to unselfish interests. This idea of manhood, based not only on force and courage, but on truth, on refinement, on public spirit, on soberness and modesty, on consideration for others, was taking possession of the younger generation of Elizabeth's middle years." "It was to grow into those strong, simple, noble characters, pure in aim and devoted to duty, the Falklands, the Hampdens, who amid so much evil form such a remarkable feature in the Civil Wars, both on the Royalist and the Parliamentary sides."

There were three distinguished men of that time, who one after another were Spenser's friends and patrons, and who were men in whom he saw realized his conceptions of human excellence and nobleness; they were Sir Philip Sidney, Lord Grey of Wilton, and Sir Walter Raleigh. The "*Faerie Queene*" reflects, as in a variety of separate mirrors and spiritualized forms, the characteristics of these men and of such as they.

Poetry has no higher function than the creation of new and lofty ideals, the cherishing of which is the essential condition of noble life, alike for individuals and communities. Such ideals tend to check all degrading conceptions of human nature, and to inspire faith in its higher possibilities. They act like beacons, shining with clear and steady light above life's troubled sea, guiding the storm-tossed mariner, and "saving those that eye them."

It is not surprising that Spenser's great work, which, while conferring upon humanity this priceless boon, gave, at the same time, such vivid expression to the national life of the period, should have been hailed with enthusiasm by the various classes of the community, becoming we are told, "the delight of every accomplished gentleman, the model of every poet, the solace of every soldier."

Spenser, however, was not merely the favourite poet of the Elizabethans. His passionate love of moral beauty, combined with his marvellous imagery, and the witchery of his verse, have endeared him to the hearts of succeeding generations, and his admirers in the nineteenth century, if not so numerous as those of the sixteenth, are equally enthusiastic in their appreciation of his genius.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

1564-1616.

WHILE, as we have seen, many salient features of the sixteenth century were reflected in the poems of Spenser, the Elizabethan age, from a different standpoint, is mirrored also in the drama, which, at that period, sprang into sudden and exuberant life. Heretofore, in England, "Miracle-plays and Moralities had formed the chief intellectual pabulum of the people. The performance of these colossal pageants, sometimes in the cathedral, sometimes in the market-place," had continued, from age to age, to attract immense crowds of eager spectators. Miracle-plays continued to be acted in England as late as 1598, and in the year 1600, Queen Elizabeth witnessed the performance of a Morality, entitled "The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality." The English people were thus prepared for the enjoyment of the stage; "thus also," as observed by Mr. J. A. Symonds, "the dramatic form was impressed upon the literary productions of the age."

One of the most remarkable features of the miracle-plays is their curious blending of religion and buffoonery; low jests and practical jokes being associated with the most sacred themes. When, with the altered condition of the times, the recognition of this incongruity, with other causes, led to the suppression of the miracle-plays, the satire and the parody in these representations were ready to detach themselves from the religious element and to take the form of comedy, a taste for which was being awakened by the growing familiarity

with Plautus, to whom the dramatic contemporaries of Shakespeare were largely indebted for incidents and plots, while Shakespeare himself has founded one play, the "Comedy of Errors," upon a plot of the Roman comedian. Reference to Plautus is also made by Nicholas Udale, the author of "Ralph Royster Doyster," one of the earliest English comedies, which was followed, after a considerable interval, by "Gammer Gurton's Needle." As early as 1520, a comedy of Plautus, most probably in the original, had been acted before Henry VIII.

In order to understand the development of the Elizabethan drama, reference must be made to the enthusiasm for classical antiquity awakened by the Renaissance, the influence of which, after revolutionizing the literature of Italy, had, at the period in question, been extended to England, where it profoundly modified the taste of the educated classes, the queen herself having been distinguished by her Greek and Latin erudition.

With the revival of learning, English scholars, familiar with the literature of Greece and Rome, were anxious to impress upon the genius of their contemporaries, the classical forms of which they were themselves enamoured.

In 1562, "Gorboduc," by Thomas Sackville, the first regular drama to appear upon the English stage, was performed before Queen Elizabeth at Whitehall. This tragedy, strictly classical in form, was hailed with enthusiasm by Sir Philip Sidney, who, in his "Defence of Poetry," inveighs, in the strongest terms, against the barbarous violation of the classical unities, practised by the playwrights of the period. In 1581, Seneca's ten plays, founded upon those of the Attic tragedians, and translated into English, were collected and printed. Fortunately these efforts were unsuccessful; it was impossible that a national drama, springing into life at a period of such intense and multiform excitement, should be fashioned in accordance with the newly discovered models of classical antiquity.

Nevertheless, though unavailing for their immediate

object, these efforts to nationalize the unities, by calling attention to the principles of classical art must necessarily have exerted a powerful influence upon the dramatic literature of the age. Thus, in the later dramatists of the period, with the freer movement, the variety, the thirst for novelty and excitement, which characterized the romantic spirit, we find associated the careful construction, together with something of the sense of harmony and proportion, which are distinguishing features of the Hellenic genius.

One of the first dramatists of the romantic school to bear emphatic witness to the influence of the classicists was Christopher Marlowe (1564-1590), who, from the rival school, adopted the unrhymed pentameter, which, in "his mighty line," attained, at times, the highest perfection of which it is susceptible. We shall more fully appreciate the supreme importance, to English dramatic literature, of Marlowe's adoption of blank verse as the medium of his tragedies, if we consider Shakespeare's partiality for rhyme, and his tendency, at the commencement of his career, to revert to it, as seen not only in "Richard II." and "Romeo and Juliet," but also in his earlier comedies, a tendency from which he was emancipated, doubtless in large measure, through the influence of the elder dramatist, who has been justly characterized as "the Father of English Tragedy."¹

The dramas of Marlowe, Tamburlane, Faustus, the Jew of Malta, and Edward II., though not free from the extravagance and bombast characteristic of the age, display an intensity of passion, a power of imagination, and a command of language, which secure for their author a permanent place among the poets of England. With him were associated, as his contemporaries, and immediate successors, a host of brother dramatists: Peele, Green, and Kyd; Ben Jonson, Marston and Chapman; Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Webster, and others; a group of extraordinary men, whose genius irradiated the close of the sixteenth and the earlier de-

¹ See "A Study of Shakespeare," by Swinburne.

cadés of the seventeenth century, and among whom Ben Jonson and Chapman are especially noteworthy, the former as the author of "the Alchemist," and many charming lyrics, and the latter, as the translator of Homer; while the high quality of Webster's genius is attested by his two noble dramas, "Vittoria Corombona," and the "Duchess of Malfi."

It was in the midst of this brilliant constellation that the star of Shakespeare arose, to shine, as it traverses the ages, with ever-increasing lustre.

Assimilating the varied culture of the Elizabethan era, and dominating its heterogeneous and apparently incongruous elements, Shakespeare, as apostrophized by Ben Jonson, may truly be characterized as "the soul of the age." Holding up to nature the magic mirror of his genius, which, in its ample scope, embraced the whole of human life, and wherein, whatsoever was reflected was invested with an ideal charm, and dowered with immortality, his dramas can never become obsolete, while the morality which they embody is never extraneous, but is developed from within, and is, for the most part, in harmony with the great ethical principles which lie at the root of human existence.

Great alike as a poet and as a dramatist, in him we hail also the consummate artist;—neglecting the unities of time and place, he habitually observed the higher unities of action and of character; and his creative genius, while sounding to its depths the infinitude of human passion, and soaring to the sublimest heights of speculative thought, never over-mastered him, but was ever under the control of his all-powerful will. Accordingly, in the sublimer creations of his genius, wherein all accessories are subordinated to the central motive, he attained to that vital unity which is the essential condition of all high art, and his master-works, while displaying, in a preeminent degree, that complexity of motive and situation which distinguishes modern from ancient civilization, are as truly classics as the dramas of Æschylus and Sophocles.

Of him it has been well said by Dryden, that "he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature, he looked inwards and found her there." It would seem indeed as if all the elements of human nature existed, in embryo, in his capacious soul, whence they issued forth in endless combinations, each bearing the impress of a distinct individuality; hence his creations are living men and women, whose characters, for good or for evil, we see developing before us; hence also his marvellous universality; he sympathizes with all sorts and conditions of men, from the monarch to the clown, enters into their thoughts and feelings, knows intuitively what they will say and how they will act, and thus his creations, more perhaps than those of any other poet, with the exception of Homer, impress us with the feeling of their reality. He is no less at home in the spirit-world, and brings before us, with equal truth, the beings of fairy-land, and the preternatural denizens of Prospero's enchanted Isle, together with the Ghost in Hamlet, and the weird Sisters in Macbeth.

In thinking of Shakespeare, we are so accustomed to regard him as the poet of humanity, "who was not of an age, but for all time," that we are apt to lose sight of him, as the English poet of the Elizabethan era. Nevertheless, it is sometimes refreshing to think of the great bard as a man among his fellow-men, "in daily communion with some of sharpest and finest intellects of the time." Of his wit-combats with Ben Jonson, the following interesting record has been bequeathed to us by Thomas Fuller:—"Which two I behold like a great Spanish Galleon and an English Man-of-War; Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English Man-of-War, lesser in bulk but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention." "Brilliant talk would seem to have come to Shakespeare as easily as brilliant writing, and he would thus eclipse Jonson in society as he eclipsed him

even when dealing with Classical themes upon the Stage."¹

Nevertheless, it was Jonson who, in addition to the magnificent tribute to Shakespeare's genius, quoted above, that, "He was not of an age, but for all time," could thus apostrophize his successful rival:

"Soul of the age!
The applause! delight! and wonder of our stage!"

and who could say of him long after his death: "I loved the man, and doe honour his memory on this side idolatrie, as much as any."

Additional interest attaches also to the dramas of Shakespeare, especially to the historical plays, when studied in relation to contemporary events, and to the spirit and temper of the Elizabethan age.

To us the Wars of the Roses form an interesting episode in our national history; to the contemporaries of Shakespeare they wore a very different aspect. They must needs have been regarded with horror by those whose immediate progenitors might have fought in the contending ranks, and who had witnessed, under the successors of Bolingbroke, the realization of his terrible threat:

"If not, I'll use the advantage of my power,
And lay the summer's dust with showers of blood
Rained from the wounds of slaughter'd Englishmen."
(King Richard II. Act iii. Sc. 3.)

We can realize the feelings with which, after witnessing the play of Richard III., the audience would listen to the solemn prayer, uttered by Richmond before the battle of Bosworth Field, and also to the following words, spoken by the Conqueror, after the victory which terminated the civil war:

"England hath long been mad, and scarred herself;
The brother blindly shed the brother's blood,
The father rashly slaughtered his own son,

¹ "Shakespeare or Bacon?" Sir Theodore Martin, K.C.B.

The son, compell'd, been butcher to his sire ;
 All this divided York and Lancaster,
 Divided in their dire division.

.
 Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,
 That would reduce those bloody days again,
 And make poor England weep in streams of blood !
 Let them not live to taste this land's increase,
 That would with treason wound this fair land's peace !
 Now civil wounds are stopp'd, peace lives again ;
 That she may long live here, God say—Amen ! ”

(King Richard III. Act v. Sc. 4.)

Still more forcibly would the play of King Henry VIII. appeal to an audience whose fathers, having lived through the events there dramatized, might have been present in court when the king and queen appeared before the papal nuncio, and to whom Cardinal Wolsey had been, not a grand historical figure, but a living personality ; a generation, moreover, the elders among whom had lived through the terrible Marian persecution, when, in the brief space of three years and a half, two hundred and eighty martyrs had perished at the stake, would listen with enthusiasm to the prophetic words uttered by Cranmer at the christening of Elizabeth.

—Again, when we remember that Shakespeare's arrival in London preceded by a single year the coming of the Armada ; that he shared with his contemporaries the burst of patriotic enthusiasm awakened by that event, together with the feelings of triumph, of exultation, of immense relief, which followed the national victory, we shall more fully appreciate the lines in which his passionate love of England finds such exquisite expression, as in John of Gaunt's enthusiastic apostrophe :

“ This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
 This other Eden, demi-paradise ;
 This fortress, built by nature for herself,
 Against infection, and the hand of war ;
 This happy breed of men, this little world ;
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,

Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands ;

.

This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world ;

.

England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
Of watery Neptune." (King Richard II. Act ii. Sc. 1.)

I am tempted in this connection to quote the following passage from Mr. Green's popular "History of England."

" 'King John' is a trumpet-call to rally round Elizabeth in her fight for England. Again a Pope was asserting his right to depose an English Sovereign, and to loose Englishmen from their bond of allegiance. Again political ambitions and civil discord woke at the call of religious war. Again a foreign power was threatening England at the summons of Rome, and hoping to master her with the aid of revolted Englishmen. . . . What Shakespeare sang was the duty of patriotism, the grandeur of loyalty, the freedom of England from Pope or Spaniard, its safety within its 'water-walled bulwark,' if only its national union was secure. And now that the nation was at one, now that he had seen, in his first years of London life, Catholics and Protestants trooping to the muster at Tilbury and hastening down Thames to the fight in the Channel, he could thrill his hearers with the proud words that sum up the work of Elizabeth :

"This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself,
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them : Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true."

(King John, Act v. Sc. 7.)

Two characteristic features of English life, in the sixteenth century, are strikingly illustrated in the dramas of Shakespeare, namely, its belief in witchcraft, and its intense interest in the Bible. The former, now universally regarded as a baleful superstition, was, in Shakespeare's time, a terrible reality, and is said to have been rendered more formidable by the Reformation. The Church, invested, as was supposed, with power and authority to repel the assaults of Satan, was regarded as affording to her votaries a shelter from diabolical agency; while those who had abandoned her communion, finding themselves without external protection against the wiles of the Evil One, looked with abhorrence, heightened by fear, upon those human beings, who were believed to be in league with their arch enemy, and to share his malignant hatred of mankind; hence they imagined that they were doing God service by putting to death these supposed wielders of infernal power, who were immolated without the slightest compunction.

The universality of this belief in England, in the sixteenth century, is attested by the severity of the penal enactments against witches, which then disgraced our Statute Book, while, at the same period, many executions of these unfortunate beings took place in Scotland.

Bearing in mind the popular belief in witchcraft, entertained as it was by all classes of the community, we may form some conception of the effect which would be produced upon a London audience by the appearance upon the stage of "the weird sisters" in "Macbeth," who, with their appalling aspect, and strange attire, and portrayed with the great poet's masterful genius, would appear to the spectators as ideal impersonations of terrible realities.

The second characteristic feature, above alluded to, of English life in the sixteenth century, namely, its intense interest in the Bible, is also strikingly illustrated in the dramas of Shakespeare. To us, who, from our childhood have been familiar with the sacred volume it is

difficult to realize the feelings of those to whom it appealed with all the charm of novelty.

Great indeed was the influence which, through its sudden popularity, it exerted, not only over the religion of the period, but also over its intellectual development and its social life.

It must, moreover, be remembered that, as yet, the Bible formed almost the only literature which was practically accessible to ordinary Englishmen; "it was the one book familiar to all."

"Legend and annal, warsong and psalm, state-roll and biography, the mighty voices of prophets, the parables of Evangelists, stories of mission journeys, of perils by sea and among the heathen, philosophical arguments, apocalyptic visions,—all were flung broadcast over minds unoccupied, for the most part, by any rival learning."

"The disclosure of the stores of Greek literature had wrought the revolution of the Renaissance; the disclosure of the older mass of Hebrew literature wrought the revolution of the Reformation."

Our forefathers in Shakespeare's time would, moreover, have been prepared to enter with keener interest and fuller understanding into the Scriptures, from their previous acquaintance with many biblical characters and events, derived from the performance of the mysteries and miracle plays.

It would, indeed, have been strange, had Shakespeare failed to share, with his contemporaries, this all-pervading influence. Stranger still if, in holding up the mirror to the Elizabethan age, he had failed to reproduce one of its most salient features. So deeply was the poet's mind imbued with the language and literature of the Old and New Testaments, that "he¹ does not hesitate to put biblical expressions into the mouths of his heathen personages, as for instance in "Julius Cæsar" (i. 2), where he makes Cassius say:

¹ "William Shakespeare," by Carl Elze, translated by L. Dora Schmitz.

"There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd
The eternal devil to keep his state in Rome
As easily as a king."

Or when in "Antony and Cleopatra," Antony exclaims :

"O, that I were
Upon the hill of Basan, to ontroar
The horned herd !" (Act. iii. Sc. 11.)

Thus also, in "The Merchant of Venice," we find Shylock, the Jew, referring to the publicans of the New Testament : "How like a fawning publican he looks." (Act i. Sc. 3.)

The intimate acquaintance with the Bible characteristic of the Elizabethan age, appears from the fact that, in the Shakespearian dramas, it is quoted familiarly by high and low, rich and poor, by kings and queens, and also by hired murderers and clowns. Volumes have been written in confirmation of this view, in illustration of which a few examples must suffice. Thus in "Richard II." there are no fewer than seventeen allusions to Scripture from which I select the following. Bolingbroke, when maintaining that Mowbray had plotted the Duke of Gloster's death, continues :

"Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth
To me for justice and rough chastisement."
(Act i. Sc. 1.)

In the same scene, Richard, speaking of Norfolk, says :

"Rage must be withstood :
Give me his gage : lions make leopards tame.
Norfolk. Yea, but not change their spots."

In Scene 2, the Duchess of Gloster thus addresses John o' Gaunt :

"Edward's seven sons, whereof thyself art one,
Were as seven phials of his sacred blood."

In the Duke of York's garden, the gardener is thus addressed by the Queen :

“Thou, old Adam's likeness,
Set to dress this garden, how dares
Thy harsh rude tongue sound this displeasing news?
What Eve, what serpent hath suggested thee
To make a second fall of cursed man?”

(Act iii. Sc. 4.)

Richard, when confined in Pomfret Castle, compares his prison to the world, and imagining his own thoughts to form the population, thus expresses himself :

“As thus—come little ones;—and then again
It is as hard to come, as for a camel
To thread the postern of a needle's eye.”

(Act iv. Sc. 5.)

And, when summoned to Westminster Hall to surrender the crown, he exclaims, with reference to the revolted peers :

“Did they not sometime cry, All hail! to me?
So Judas did to Christ: but he in twelve,
Found truth in all but one; I, in twelve thousand, none.”

(Act iv. Sc. 1.)

Again, when required to read the paper setting forth his alleged crimes, he thus addresses the assembled peers :

“Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates
Have here delivered me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin.” (Act. iv. Sc. 1.)

Finally, in the speech addressed by Bolingbroke to Exton, King Richard's murderer, we find the words :

“Like Cain, go wander through the shades of night.”

(Act v. Sc. 6.)

There is an allusion to Pilate also in “Richard III.” where the second murderer, after dispatching the Duke of Clarence, exclaims :

"How fain, like Pilate, would I wash my hands
Of this most grievous guilty murder done!"

(Act i. Sc. 4.)

Very numerous are the allusions to Scripture put into the mouth of Falstaff, from which I select the following:

In "King Henry IV." (first part), he says:

"If then, the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff."

"If to be fat is to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved." (Act ii. Sc. 4.)

With reference to his soldiers, he says: "You would think that I had a hundred and fifty tattered prodigals, lately come from swine keeping, from eating draff and husks." (Act iv. Sc. 2.)

Allusion is also made to the parable of the Prodigal Son in "As You Like It," and in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona."

In "King Henry VI." (first part), Alençon declares that England sends forth none but Samsons and Goliasses, and the Dauphin says to La Pucelle,

"Thou fightest with the sword of Deborah."

(Act i. Sc. 2.)

In "King Henry VI." (third part), Clarence, referring to another portion of the Book of Judges, says:

"To keep that oath were more impiety
Than Jephtha's when he sacrificed his daughter."

(Act v. Sc. 1.)

There is an allusion to Jephtha and his daughter also in "Hamlet" (Act ii. Sc. 2).

In the "Merchant of Venice," Shylock tells what happened:

"When Jacob graz'd his uncle Laban's sheep." (Act i. Sc. 3.)

And in "Twelfth Night," the clown says to Malvolio:

"There is no darkness but ignorance, in which thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog."

(Act iv. Sc. 2.)

Such quotations, which might be largely multiplied, suffice to illustrate Shakespeare's familiarity with Holy Writ, while numerous passages may be adduced, giving expression to religious principles and sentiments derived from the same source. Thus in *King Henry IV.* (first part), Palestine is described as :

“Those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,
Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nailed
For our advantage on the bitter cross.” (Act i. Sc. 1.)

And in “*Measure for Measure*,” Isabella thus addresses Angelo :

“Alas ! alas !
Why all the souls that are, were forfeit once ;
And he that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy.” (Act ii. Sc. 2.)

There would seem to be a striking affinity between Shakespeare's genius and that of the grand old Hebrew bards, as revealed by the intense passion with which, in common, they appeal to the varied phenomena of Nature, as sympathizing with the joys and sorrows of humanity.

How magnificent, for example, is the following outburst in the triumphal battle-ode wherewith Deborah celebrates her victory over Sisera ! “They fought from heaven ; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera ; the river Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon.” (*Judges*, v. 20, 21.)

Thus also the prophet Isaiah, in giving vent to his rapturous joy at Israel's return from captivity, breaks forth into similar strains :—“Sing, O heavens ; and be joyful, O earth ; and break forth into singing, O mountains ; for the Lord hath comforted his people and will have mercy upon his afflicted.” (*xliv.* 23.)

We are reminded of the anguished cry of Queen Constance, in “*King John*,” in behalf of her son Arthur :

“Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjur'd kings !
A widow cries ; be husband to me, heavens !

Let not the hours of this ungodly day
Wear out the day in peace." (Act iii. Sc. 1.)

Thus also King Lear at sight of Goneril bursts forth :

"Who comes here? O heavens,
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Allow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause ; send down and take my part." (Act ii. Sc. 4.)

Numerous passages might be quoted from the Hebrew prophets and also from Shakespeare, in which insensible objects, and even the senseless earth, are represented as ready to sympathize with human emotion.

Thus the prophet Habakkuk announces the rebuke which would be forthcoming against the covetousness of the rich :—"The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." (ii. 11.)

And King Richard II., on his return from Ireland, thus apostrophizes the coast of Wales :

"This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones
Prove armed soldiers, ere her native king
Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms." (Act iii. Sc. 2.)

In the Third Part of "King Henry VI." the Earl of Warwick compares his own fall to that of the cedar,

"Whose arms gave shelter to the princely eagle,
Under whose shade the ramping lion slept." (Act v. Sc. 2.)

The same image occurs in the prophecy of Ezekiel, who compares the fall of Assyria to that of a cedar in Lebanon :—"All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young ; under his shadow dwelt all great nations." (Ezek. xxxi. 6.)

Another striking instance of parallelism between Shakespeare and the Bible is found in the language employed by King Henry V., in celebrating the battle of Agincourt, and the song sung by Moses and the children of Israel after the destruction of the Egyptians. Both

commemorate occasions of national deliverance from imminent and apparently inevitable destruction. In the song of Moses, it is the Lord who is extolled as having "triumphed gloriously;" "the Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders." This conception of God, as the supreme Deliverer, which formed one of the fundamental principles of Hebraism, passed thence into Christianity, and has found forcible expression in the language attributed by Shakespeare to King Henry V.

Thus, when Montjoy announces to the king:—"The day is yours," Henry exclaims:

"Praised be God, and not our strength for it!" (Act iv. Sc. 7.)

And to the English herald he bursts forth in the same strain:

"O God, thy arm was here,
And not to us, but to thy arm alone
Ascribe we all. Take it, God,
For it is wholly thine.

Exeter.

King Henry. Come, go we in procession to the village;
And be it death proclaimed through our host,
To boast of this, or take that praise from God,
Which is His only." (Act iv. Sc. 8.)

So wonderfully real are Shakespeare's ideal creations, that, like the leading characters of history, they form, as it were, a vital element in our national life; so much so, indeed, that according to the late Thomas Carlyle, the genius of Shakespeare is more potent than any other agency, in binding together the scattered members of the British Empire. Be that as it may, his principle characters have been so amply and so ably discussed by competent critics, both at home and abroad, that it would be alike presumptuous and superfluous on my part to enter the lists. I shall content myself, therefore, before bidding farewell to our great dramatist, with calling attention to one feature of his genius which strikes me

as remarkable, namely, the general superiority as regards moral qualities of his female over his male personages.

Wonderful, indeed, is the company of noble and charming women, displaying the greatest variety of character and temperament, bequeathed to the world by our immortal bard; Imogen and Hermione; the Portia of the "Merchant of Venice," and the Portia of "Julius Cæsar;" Isabella, Queen Constance, and Queen Katherine; Desdemona and Cordelia; Rosalind and Beatrice; Juliet, Perdita, Miranda, and others, forming a galaxy of immortal creations, who for all time will be taken to the heart of humanity, as noble and gracious types of womanhood.

Of a different order, with few exceptions, are the principal male personages of the Shakespearian drama:—Hamlet, Othello and Iago, King Lear, Macbeth, King Richard III., and many others who, while marvellous as dramatic creations, must be regarded as warnings rather than as examples, and as exhibiting the utter ruin resulting, not alone from the tremendous force of evil passions, impelling their victims to the commission of crime, but also from lack of moral insight and from feebleness of will.

In Henry V., indeed, we have his ideal of a patriotic and an heroic king, the object of enthusiastic admiration to the English people, and of devoted loyalty to his fellow-soldiers, whose hardships he had shared, and whose well-being he had identified with his own; while in Prospero, the presiding genius of the "Tempest," the concluding effort of the poet's genius, he has created a character truly admirable, distinguished alike for largeness of intellect and goodness of heart. Among Shakespeare's secondary male characters, several noteworthy individualities are to be found, such as Horatio in "Hamlet," Kent in "King Lear," Antonio in the "Merchant of Venice," the Bastard in "King John," and others; they are, however, few in number compared with his company of good women.¹

¹ See "Shakespeare, his Mind and Art." Prof. Dowden.

It is remarkable that Shakespeare, whose dramas, among other features of the Elizabethan era, reflect that devotion to monarchy which formed one of its most striking characteristics, and which manifested itself in the passionate loyalty of all classes of the community, should have embodied his highest ideal of political virtue in Brutus, the stern Roman Republican, to whom the welfare of the Commonwealth was the one object of supreme interest to which he sacrificed every other tie. Intimately associated with this type of heroic manhood is that of heroic womanhood, each rendering more conspicuous the nobleness of the other; Brutus, the Roman patriot, is dear to our hearts as the husband, loving and beloved, of Portia, Cato's daughter, his true and honourable wife, who, "being so fathered and so husbanded," "claimed by the right and virtue of her place," to be his trusted friend and confidant.

The nobility of character in Brutus is attested by the high esteem in which he was universally held, as revealed in the words of Casca :

"O, he sits high in all the people's hearts ;
And that which would appear offence in us,
His countenance, like richest alchemy,
Will change to virtue and to worthiness." (Act. i. Sc. 3.)

What, however, invests the character of Brutus with peculiar charm is the remarkable combination which it exhibits of magnanimity and unswerving allegiance to what he believes to be right, with great sensitiveness and exquisite tenderness, as displayed, not only in his relations with Portia, but also in his demeanour towards Lucius, his young attendant, in the touching scene on the eve of the battle of Philippi.¹

Very noble is the eulogy pronounced by Mark Antony after the battle over the body of Brutus :

"This was the noblest Roman of them all ;
All the conspirators, save only he,

¹ See "Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity," Paul Stapfer. Translated by Emily J. Carey.

Did what they did in envy of great Cæsar ;
He only, in a general honest thought,
And common good of all, made one of them.
His life was gentle ; and the elements
So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up,
And say to all the world, This was a man ! " (Act v. Sc. 5.)

When we consider the tremendous struggle which was, ere long, to divide his countrymen into two hostile camps, we may well feel grateful to Shakespeare for bequeathing to them this grand example of public and of private virtue, of fidelity and womanly tenderness in the relations of domestic life, combined with self-denying devotion to the common weal.

From Brutus, the republican patriot of Rome, as portrayed by Shakespeare, to John Milton, the republican patriot of England, the transition would be natural. It will, however, be necessary, before considering the great English poet of the seventeenth century, to take a hasty survey of the dramatic literature of Spain, as represented by Shakespeare's contemporary, Lope de Vega, and by his immediate successor, Pedro Calderon de la Barca.

SPAIN.

LOPE DE VEGA. 1562—1635.

PEDRO CALDERON DE LA BARCA. 1600—1681.

GENUINE poetry, though the highest expression of its author's individuality, nevertheless, like the fauna and flora of the natural world, is at the same time redolent of its native soil, and bears the impress of the region which gave it birth.

This is preeminently true of the dramatic literature of Spain, a poetic growth which, towards the close of the sixteenth, and through the greater part of the seventeenth century, flourished with marvellous luxuriance, and faithfully reproduced upon the stage the national character and life of the period.

In order to understand the affluence of the Spanish drama during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we must consider under some of its more salient features this memorable epoch in the history of Spain, when she had attained to a height of dignity and power which placed her at the head of Christendom. It was in the last decade of the previous century that the deadly conflict, which for seven hundred years the Spaniards had without intermission waged against the Moors, had been brought to a close. The cross had triumphed over the crescent, and the country had been redeemed from the intolerable degradation of infidel supremacy. This protracted struggle had left its mark upon the national character. Every Spaniard was a born crusader, devoted

with passionate fervour to the Roman Catholic faith the triumph of which had been the object of so costly a sacrifice. "War with the infidel in one shape or another had become almost a necessity of the national mind."

"The field for the exercise of this Christian chivalry at home was no sooner closed to the Spanish cavalier, than other and wider fields were opened. Granada was taken in 1492; in the very same year Columbus discovered a New World, to the conquering of which the Spaniard advanced quite as much in the spirit of a crusader as of a gold-seeker."¹

Nor were Spanish valour and Spanish fanaticism to find scope for their exercise only in the transatlantic world. "The years during which Cortez was slowly winning his way to the final conquest of the Mexican Empire were exactly the earliest years of the Reformation in Europe (1518-1521). This Reformation, adopted by the north of Europe, repelled by the south, was by none so energetically repelled as by the Spaniard, who henceforward found a sphere wide as the whole civilized world in which to make proof that they were the most Christian of all Christian nations, the most Catholic of all Catholics."

"Enriched by the boundless wealth of the western world, having passed in Philip II.'s time from freedom into despotism, and bringing the energies nursed in freedom to be wielded with the unity which despotism possesses, she rose during the sixteenth century ever higher in power and consideration." It was towards the close of that century, that the great epoch of the Spanish drama was inaugurated by Lope de Vega, who, born in 1562, after a life of adventure and vicissitude, in 1588, joined the Invincible Armada, "eager to punish the murderers of Mary Stuart." Subsequently, overwhelmed with grief for the loss of a beloved wife and child, he, like so many of his poetical compeers, entered into holy

¹ Archbishop Trench.

orders, and till his death in 1635 was distinguished for the fervour of his devotion and for his philanthropic zeal.

Recognized as the most prolific writer whom the world has ever seen, he composed many longer poems, epic, narrative and descriptive; one of these poems entitled "The Tragic Crown," and founded on the history of Mary Stuart, was dedicated to Pope Urban VIII., from whom the poet received a letter, written with the pontiff's own hand. In this poem the unhappy Queen of Scots is represented as a glorious martyr, while Elizabeth figures alternately as a bloody Jezebel and another Athaliah; a striking contrast is thus presented to Spenser's "Faerie Queene," where Mary appears as the false Duessa of Rome, and Elizabeth is glorified as "the empress of all nobleness," and "the lady of compassion and grace." There could hardly be a more striking illustration of the bitter national hatred excited throughout Europe by the religious antagonisms characteristic of the age.

In addition to these poems Lope de Vega was the author of two lengthy pastorals, a vast number of lyrics, seven hundred sonnets, together with numerous poems, humorous and burlesque.

These miscellaneous productions, however, being written for the most part under the influence of Italian models, which, at that time, were popular among the upper classes of Spain, would not explain the marvellous popularity which he enjoyed during his life, or the profound sensation caused by his death. To account for the enthusiastic admiration, amounting almost to idolatry, in which he was held by his countrymen, we must turn to another province in literature, the drama, which in Spain, as in England, took its rise from the miracle plays, the performance of which, under the auspices of the Church, had for centuries formed the chief source alike of popular entertainment and of popular instruction.

In both countries, the secular detaching itself from the religious element, developed into the national

drama, while in Spain alone the religious element survived, and in the form of the "Auto Sacramentale" continued to hold its ground till the middle of the eighteenth century, when it was suppressed by royal authority.

Moreover, in Spain as well as in England, the national drama, triumphing over the efforts of scholars, who strove to bring it into harmony with classical models, became a faithful reflection of the life and genius of the age. Among the causes which led to the rapid development of the Spanish drama was the recognition of Madrid as the capital of Spain. Under the influence of the Court and of the nobility, who thronged to the royal residence, the Spanish drama "rose like an exhalation;" "a school of poets, many of whom hastened from Seville, Valencia, Granada, and other parts of the country, collected round Lope de Vega, then regarded as "the monarch of the stage," and who, by his marvellous fertility so greatly enlarged the scope of the national drama that he may justly be regarded as its founder. "He was," it has been said, "the incarnation of the national genius in its Oriental prodigality." Of the fifteen hundred dramas which he is said to have written, little more than five hundred appear to have been published, and of these it is difficult now to obtain a complete collection.

To give any detailed account of these multifarious productions would here be out of place. Suffice it to say that, in accordance with the national genius, Lope de Vega was the poet, not of character, but of situation and incident; in his dramas the delineation of character is made subservient to the action of the piece. The chief interest centres in the story which, with its novel situations, startling incidents, complicated intrigues, its plot and underplot, riveted the attention of the audience, keeping up their curiosity as to the denouement till the conclusion of the play.

A few of his dramas indeed are of a higher order; one of the most interesting, "The Estrella di Sevilla," which

has been altered and revived at Madrid under the name of "*Sancho Ortiz de las Roelas*," is truly tragic, and awakens our warmest interest in its leading personages. The following brief analysis is from the history of Spanish literature by George Ticknor, who says of this drama that, in some respects, it resembles Corneille's "*Cid*." "At the command of his king, and from the truest Castilian loyalty, a knight of Seville kills his friend, a brother of *Estrella*, the lady whom he is about to marry. The king afterwards endeavours to hold him harmless for the crime, but the royal judges refuse to interrupt the course of the law in his favour, and the brave knight is saved from death only by the plenary confession of his guilty sovereign. It is one of the very small number of Lope's pieces that have no comic or distracting under-plot, and it is to be placed among the loftiest of his efforts."

"Not a few of its scenes are admirable; especially that in which the king urges the knight to kill his friend; that in which *Estrella*, whom the knight is about to marry, receives in the midst of her happiness the dead body of her brother who has been slain by her lover: and that in which the *alcaldes* solemnly refuse to wrest the law in obedience to the royal command."

Estrella, pressed by the king to marry *Sancho Ortiz*, while she acknowledges her love for him, is unable to overcome her repugnance to union with her brother's murderer, and obstinately persists in her refusal. "The conclusion is better than that in the tragedy of Corneille; *Estrella* abandons the world and retires to a convent."

"In addition to Lope's exhaustless fertility, and his marvellous powers of invention, with which he never ceased to captivate his audience, must be added the charm of his versification, his occasional pathos, and his exuberant and untiring gaiety."

Another source of his popularity was the frequent introduction into his dramas of the old Spanish and *Morisco* ballads which, celebrating the exploits of the *Cid* and other favourite heroes, and painting the manners of

the Moriscoes, form so striking and characteristic a feature of the national poetry.

"When, in his drama of 'Santa Fé,' in which was introduced all that was most imposing in the siege of Granada, one of his personages breaks out with a variation of the grand old ballad, 'Now Santa Fé is circled round,' it must have stirred his audience as with the sound of a trumpet."

In accordance with his own confession, he sought the applause of the multitude, "whom," he says, "it is but just to humour in their folly, since it is they who pay for it." It must be confessed that in compliance with this principle, he sacrificed without scruple to the general interest of the plot, not only dramatic probabilities together with the facts of history and geography, but too frequently also the commonest rules of morality.

On the occasion of his death in 1635, "all Spain was eager to do him honour." Nothing could exceed the pomp and solemnity of his funeral, which lasted nine days. "The sensation produced by his death being, if possible, more astonishing than the reverence in which he was held while living."

Among his successors, many of whom were poets endowed with manifold gifts, there is one, Pedro Calderon de la Barca, of whom it has been said that "he will hold his ground in the august synod of the 'heirs of memory,' whose reputation is for all time." Born in 1600, of noble parentage, he passed from the College of the Jesuits to the University of Salamanca, where he graduated in 1619, adopting the profession of arms; he for several years fought in the service of his country, without, however, deserting the service of the Muse. His first comedy having been composed in his fourteenth year, and many of his dramas having already appeared upon the stage, he was, on the death of Lope de Vega, formally attached to the Court as director of the royal theatre.

In 1651 he entered a religious brotherhood, and in 1663 was created chaplain of honour to the king. His

poetical activity was never relaxed till his death, when at the advanced age of eighty-one he passed tranquilly away on May 26th, 1681.

Both he and Lope de Vega were passionately devoted to Roman Catholicism, and the services of both were in constant requisition by the Church for the composition of "*Autos Sacramentales*," or dramas for Corpus Christi day, which stand alone in dramatic literature, and are peculiarly characteristic of the Spanish nation. They constitute the earliest form of the Spanish drama, and still hold their ground in the remote villages of Spain.

Appealing to all classes of society, and exhibiting a strange mingling of incongruous elements, the "*Autos*," with musical accompaniments, were performed in the open air, with every scenic appliance which could add to their solemnity and effect. Of these strange compositions, Lope de Vega produced four hundred, of which thirty still survive, while Calderon has left no less than seventy-three.

In his interesting account of Calderon's "*Autos*," Archbishop Trench, after alluding to their wide range of subject, including themes allegorical and metaphysical, facts and personages of the Old and New Testaments, together with the legends of classical antiquity, employed by the poet as symbols of the highest truth, expresses his astonishment and admiration at the skill with which the poet conquers the most unconquerable difficulties of his theme. Of one of Calderon's "*Autos*," "the great theatre of the world," the title of which sufficiently indicates its subject, the archbishop has given an analysis, together with copious verse quotations, while another, entitled "*The Divine Orpheus*" is described by Ticknor in his history of Spanish literature.

Calderon, like Lope de Vega, was distinguished by his exuberant powers of invention and by the marvellous skill with which he carried on a complicated plot; nor was he more scrupulous than his predecessor in sacrificing the facts of history and of geography to the exigencies of his story; Jerusalem is represented by him as on the sea-coast, and Herodotus is made to describe America.

Like Lope also, whom, however, he excelled in earnestness and depth, he was the poet of incident and of situation rather than of character; nevertheless, there are some of his creations into whom he has breathed the breath of life, and whom we feel to be not mere impersonations but living individualities. Among these I would especially notice Pedro Crespo, a truly noble character, the honest peasant in "The Mayor of Zalamia," translated by Mr. Fitzgerald.

Calderon's fecundity, though not equal to that of Lope de Vega, was sufficiently remarkable. In addition to his seventy-three sacramental "Autos," he left one hundred and eight complete dramas, together with a number of songs, odes, ballads, and other poems. Among his religious dramas, of which he wrote fifteen, the most remarkable are, "The Purgatory of St. Patrick," "The Wonder-working Magician," and "Devotion to the Cross," to the latter of which I shall subsequently call attention in another connection.

Many of Calderon's most noteworthy secular dramas, such as "Life is a dream," "The Mayor of Zalamia," and others, are well known through the medium of translations, nor would it be possible here to dwell upon them in detail: I must therefore content myself with calling attention to a drama entitled "The physician of his own honour," which, as being founded upon the passion of jealousy, suggests a comparison with "Othello."

The contrast between the Spanish and the English dramatist, in their respective delineation of this deadly passion, has been pointed out by Mr. Lewis in the following passage:

"When a man's wife is unfaithful to him there are two deep feelings which she must outrage: love and honour. According to the relative strength of these feelings, either love will be most lacerated, and the wounds of honour will barely be noted; or else honour will be the suffering point. In "Othello" it is love that suffers. The shaft enters his heart, and there

the anguish becomes so intense that life becomes desolate and worthless to him, and he has no heed of his honour because his grief is too great to bear a rival." "In Calderon it is the stain upon the honour which is avenged, while in Shakespeare it is the wronged love."

"According to the Spanish conception, honour is a thing external, it depends on others, if others do not know you to be dishonoured, you are not; But if they suspect you to be so, by that very fact you are so."

In Calderon's drama, "The physician of his own honour," Don Gutierre, who has no sufficient ground for suspecting the honour of his wife, when asked by the King what he has seen, characteristically replies: "Nothing; men like me do not care to see, enough if they suspect." He accordingly causes his innocent wife to be put to death, and his honour being thus vindicated, he consents, at the King's command, without any apparent unwillingness on his part, to marry Leonora.

Calderon's drama entitled "No monster like jealousy," "is founded on the well-known story, in Josephus, of the cruel jealousy of Herod, Tetrarch of Judæa, who twice gave orders to have his wife Marianne destroyed, in case he himself should not escape alive from the perils to which he was exposed in his successive contests with Antony and Octavius."

This drama, wherein the cruel and remorseless character of jealousy is portrayed with terrible power, and which contains scenes of deep and tragic interest, has been regarded by some critics as Calderon's master-work.

Before passing on to consider another point of contrast between the Spanish and English poets, Calderon and Shakespeare, it will be necessary to dwell very briefly upon the religious attitude of Spain, at the period under consideration.

From the prolonged struggle with the Infidel, to which allusion has already been made, Mediæval Catholicism was at that period not only paramount in Spain, but

was wrought into the very texture of the national life, and forms consequently a prominent feature in the national drama, wherein that life was faithfully mirrored.

It is a curious phenomenon that, during the seventeenth century, when, in most European countries, the human mind had to a great extent been emancipated from the thralldom of Mediæval Sacerdotalism, the darkness of the middle ages, in regard to theology, should have till brooded over the region, which at that period in political power and influence, occupied the most prominent position in Christendom. Lope de Vega and Calderon were both holy Inquisitors, nor was the office, at least in the case of the former, merely nominal. In 1623, a poor man having been declared by the Inquisition to be a Lutheran and a Calvinist was ordered to be burnt alive. "The excitement was great; an immense concourse of people was gathered to witness the spectacle; the court was present; and we are told that Lope de Vega, who in some parts of his "*Dragontea*," shows a spirit not unworthy of such an office, was one of those who presided on the occasion and directed the ceremonies." Judging indeed of the national character, as reflected in the national drama, it would almost seem as if, in the mind of the Spaniard of that day, the sense of right and wrong had been superseded by devotion to the Church, to whose authority he submitted, without question, alike his understanding and his conscience; and by chivalric loyalty to the king, to whose commands, even when fatal to his dearest interests, he yielded unswerving obedience; the recognized theory being that "a king is responsible to God alone for his actions, and that the only duty of a subject is to obey him."

One of the most fatal effects resulting from this dethronement of Conscience, and the substitution for her dictates of an external authority, as exhibited in the Spanish drama, is the not infrequent coexistence, in the same individual, of the grossest immorality with the most fervent religious faith; this unnatural union is strikingly exemplified in Calderon's famous drama "*Devotion to*

the Cross," which is founded on the adventures of a man who, "though his life is a tissue of gross and atrocious crimes, is yet made an object of the especial favour of God, because he shows a uniform external reverence for whatever has the form of a cross; and who, dying in a ruffian brawl, as a robber, is yet, in consequence of this devotion to the Cross, miraculously restored to life, that he may confess his sins, be absolved, and then be transported directly to heaven."

Under such circumstances, there is no place for remorse; the criminal, being absolved by the Church, is relieved from all sense of guilt, and goes on his way, regardless of public opinion, and careful only scrupulously to observe the external requirements of his religion. Thus, in Calderon's drama, above alluded to, the hero, while pursuing his career of crime, never fails to erect over his victims the sacred symbol of the Cross. To the protestant mind such a perversion of the religious sentiment seems almost incredible; and it is well perhaps that this final outcome of Mediæval Theology should have been exhibited by a poet of whose devotion to the Catholic Church there can be no question. His "Devotion to the Cross," as remarked by Mr. Lewis, "might otherwise have been regarded as a Satire." Very striking, in this regard, is the contrast between the Spanish and the Shakespearian dramas, where, in several of the most prominent characters, the sentiment of remorse finds the most poignant expression. Thus in "Hamlet" the King exclaims:

"O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven,
It hath the primal eldest curse upon it,
A brother's murder."—

In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft 'tis seen, the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies,
In his true nature; and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults

To give in evidence.

O wretched state ! O bosom, black as death ! ”

Where, in the wide range of literature, has the misery which waits on crime found more solemn expression than through the utterances of Lady Macbeth, during the unconsciousness of sleep ! And what a depth of anguish is revealed in the words addressed by Macbeth, to the doctor, on hearing from him of Lady Macbeth’s thick coming fancies :

Macbeth.

“ Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased ;
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow ;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain ;
And, with some sweet oblivious antidote,
Cleanse the stuff’d bosom of the perilous stuff,
Which weighs upon the heart ? ”

In accordance with the representation of the Spanish dramatist it was precisely such a “ sweet oblivious antidote ” which the criminal received through the absolution of the Church, and which, freeing him from the consequences of his actions, and “ razing out,” as it were, “ the written troubles of the brain,” relieved him indeed from all sense of guilt, but, at the same time, deprived him of the most powerful incentive to repentance and reformation. Unswerving obedience to the dictates of conscience, as the voice of God in the human soul, being the surest source of strength alike to individuals and to nations, may not the sudden collapse of Spain, towards the middle of the seventeenth century, have resulted, in some measure, from the debilitating effect upon the national character of devotion to a system which, based, as was imagined, on divine authority, required from its votaries unswerving and unconditional obedience, not to the dictates of conscience, but to the voice of the Church ? I should however, be doing injustice to the Spanish poet if, among the numerous creations of his genius, I dwelt only upon those which, reflecting the less favourable characteristics of the Spanish temperament, and the

more repulsive aspects of Mediæval Catholicism, fail to awaken our sympathy or are repugnant to our moral sense.

If, in some of Calderon's dramas, he exhibits the most fervent religious faith, coexisting with the grossest immorality, he shows also how, in the higher natures, it may become the source of the noblest patriotism, and the most heroic self-sacrifice. Of this we have a splendid example in Don Ferdinand, the hero of "The Firm-hearted Prince," of which, as strikingly illustrating the nobler side of Calderon's genius, I am tempted to transcribe, from Ticknor's "History of Spanish Literature," the following spirited analysis. The story of the drama was, we are told, found by the poet in the old Portuguese chronicles of Joam Alvares and Ruy de Pina.

"The first scene is one of great lyrical beauty, in the gardens of the King of Fez, whose daughter is introduced as enamoured of Muley Hassan, her father's principal general. Immediately afterwards Hassan enters, and announces the approach of a Christian armament, commanded by the two Portuguese Infantes. He is despatched to prevent their landing, but fails and is himself taken prisoner by Don Ferdinand in person. A long dialogue follows between the captive and his conqueror, which is made to explain the attachment of the Moorish general to the King's daughter and the probability—if he continues in captivity,—that she will be compelled to marry the Prince of Morocco. The Portuguese Infante, with chivalrous generosity, gives up his prisoner without ransom, but has hardly done so, before he is attacked by a large army under the Prince of Morocco, and made prisoner himself.

"From this moment begins that trial of Don Ferdinand's patience and fortitude which gives its title to the drama. At first, indeed, the king treats him generously, thinking to exchange him for Ceuta, an important fortress recently won by the Portuguese, and their earliest foothold in Africa. But this constitutes the great obstacle. The King of Portugal, who had died of grief on receiving the news of his brother's captivity, had, it

is true, left an injunction in his will, that Ceuta should be surrendered and the prince ransomed. But when Henry, one of his brothers, appears on the stage, and announces that he has come to fulfil this solemn command, Ferdinand suddenly interrupts him in the offer, and reveals at once the whole of his character."

The passage, which is too long for quotation, ends with the words, "It cannot be—it cannot be." On this resolute decision, for which the old chronicle gives no authority, the remainder of the drama rests; its deep enthusiasm being set forth in a single word of the Infante, in reply to the renewed question of the Moorish king, "And why not give up Ceuta?" to which Ferdinand firmly and simply answers,

"Because it is not mine to give,
A Christian city—it belongs to God."

In consequence of this final determination, he is reduced to the condition of a common slave. At this point, however, comes into operation of the Moorish general's gratitude. He offers Don Ferdinand the means of escape, but the king, detecting the connection between them, binds his general to an honourable fidelity by making him the prince's only keeper. This leads Don Ferdinand to a new sacrifice of himself; he not only advises his generous friend to preserve his loyalty, but assures him that, even should foreign means of escape be offered him, he will not take advantage of them if, by doing so, his friend's honour would be endangered. In the meantime the sufferings of the unhappy prince are increased by cruel treatment and unreasonable labour, till his strength is broken down. Still he does not yield. Ceuta remains in his eyes a consecrated place. The Moorish general and the king's daughter, intercede for mercy in vain. The king is inflexible, and Don Ferdinand dies, at length, of mortification, misery and want; but with a mind unshaken, and with an heroic constancy that sustains our interest in his fate to the last extremity. Just after

his death, a Portuguese army, destined to rescue him, arrives.

"In a night scene of great dramatic effect, he appears at their head, clad in the habiliments of the religious and military order in which he had desired to be buried, and, with a torch in his hand, beckons them on to victory. They obey the supernatural summons, entire success follows, and the marvellous conclusion of the whole, by which his consecrated remains are saved from Moorish contamination, is in full keeping with the romantic pathos, and high-wrought enthusiasm of the scenes that lead to it."

I have dwelt thus at length upon "The Firm-hearted Prince," not only as illustrating some striking characteristics of the national genius, as reflected in the dramas of Calderon; but also because in it, as in another remarkable drama, "Love survives Life," the poet rises above national prejudice, and renders justice to the nobler elements in the Moorish character.

In consequence of the prominent position occupied by Spain in European affairs, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Spanish language was indispensable in many cities of the continent. Thus in Rome, Naples and Milan, the dramas of Lope de Vega were performed in their original language; and once even, and probably oftener, one of his dramas was represented in the Seraglio of Constantinople. Spanish was also cultivated in England, where, we are told, "it was fashionable in Shakespeare's time, as may be concluded from the frequent introduction of Spanish words and phrases in his plays, and in those of his contemporaries." Considering, therefore, the wide diffusion of the Spanish language and the richness of Spanish literature, we are not surprised to learn that "the European drama is saturated with Spanish influence." We are informed by Mr. Lewis, to whom I am largely indebted for the above remarks, that whole scenes of Beaumont and Fletcher, and of some of their contemporaries, hitherto admired as original, will be found,

though altered, in Lope de Vega, Calderon, Cervantes, Moreto, Tirso de Molina, etc. He then proceeds to trace, more in detail, the influence which Spanish literature has exercised over our old English Dramatists. Corneille speaks with reverence of Guellan de Castro, as the original author of "The Cid," to whom "he was indebted for the general plot, and for many beauties of his celebrated play," and not a few of Molière's most striking characters can be traced to Spanish sources.

In addition to the obligation which the Spaniards have thus conferred upon the European stage, which they have supplied with plots, incidents, situations, and characters, there are other important aspects under which the influence of their literature may be considered.

In consequence of her prolonged and deadly struggle with the Infidel, Spain, having been withdrawn from the action of those spiritual forces which were elsewhere modifying European thought, continued during the seventeenth century, as before observed, to be still dominated by mediæval theology.

The unconscious testimony as to the fatal result of that theology, in undermining the moral sense, borne in several of his dramas, more especially in his "Devotion to the Cross," by a witness so fervently attached to the Roman Catholic Church as Calderon, appears to me to be a valuable, though a negative, contribution, made by Spanish poetry to the cause of human progress.

Still more important, however, are the more positive elements for which the literature of Europe is indebted to that of Spain. Another result of her prolonged conflict with the Moors was that, in an age of higher culture, she continued to exhibit the spirit of chivalry and romance which formed so striking a feature of the middle ages; hence, the Spanish poetry of the seventeenth century, carrying on the ideal of a bygone age, reflects the heroism, the loyalty, the spirit of romantic love, which inspired the knight of old, together with the religious enthusiasm which impelled the crusader to enlist under the banner of the Cross.

These various features of mediævalism were reflected in the poetry of Spain, of which Calderon was the highest representative.

Accordingly, in his nobler productions, he transports us by his vivid imagination, into an ideal region, illumined by preternatural splendour, where we are occasionally raised to an elevation of sentiment in harmony with the highly-wrought passions of the chief actors in his dramas, in whose fate he awakens the keenest sympathy and interest.

I cannot, perhaps, more appropriately conclude this inadequate notice of the poetry of Spain, than by quoting the following passage from one of Shelley's letters, dated December, 1819, in which he pays a high tribute to the great Spanish poet.

"Some of the ideal dramas of Calderon," he says, "with which I have lately, and with inexpressible wonder and delight, become acquainted, are perpetually tempting me to throw over their perfect and glowing forms, the grey veil of my own words." Accordingly beautiful translations of some scenes from "The Wonder Working Magician," are to be found among the works of the English poet.

ENGLAND.

JOHN MILTON.

1608—1674.

THE seventeenth century, an epoch momentous in our national history, is noteworthy also from a literary point of view, as having, in its earlier decades, witnessed the culmination of the Elizabethan, and before its close, the inauguration of the so-called Augustan age, while one great poet, John Milton, may justly be regarded as its poetical representative.

At the time of Shakespeare's death, Milton was eight years old: consequently upon the publication of the folio edition of the Shakespearian dramas in 1623, the young poet had entered upon his fifteenth year. How profound was the impression produced upon his mind by the dramas of the great master-singer, is attested by "The Epitaph," written in his twenty-second year, "on the admirable dramatic poet, W. Shakespeare."

Deep interest, moreover, attaches to this poem as one of the first among the numerous tributes paid by one poet to the memory of a brother-bard, of which our literature offers so many illustrious examples.

"What needs my Shakespeare, for his honour'd bones,
The labour of an age in piled stones?
Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou, in our wonder and astonishment,
Hast built thyself a live-long monument."

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Upon the remarkable group of seventeenth century poets, Milton's contemporaries, including Herrick, Carew, Crashaw, George Herbert, Vaughan, and many others, I must not dwell.

While enriching our literature with a few exquisite lyrics, together with occasional lines of great beauty, their works, excepting perhaps those of George Herbert, whose sacred poems have secured for him a place in popular favour, are comparatively little read.

Milton, on the contrary, who, as patriot, republican, and puritan, was intimately associated with the troublous times in which his lot was cast, in his poetical character rose above his contemporaries, and bequeathing to the world a treasure for all time, has realized his fondly cherished dream, "that he might perhaps leave something so written to after-time, as they should not willingly let die." Nevertheless, for their true appreciation, the poems of Milton require to be studied in connection with the political history of the period, the temper of which offers a striking contrast to that of the previous century.

The heart of England, during the latter half of the sixteenth century, had been, as already pointed out, possessed by a spirit of joyous exultation, caused in part by its twofold emancipation, from the bondage of Rome, and from the threatened invasion of Spain; it was, moreover, animated by sentiments of passionate loyalty to the Virgin Queen, while as yet, no question had been raised as to the limitation of the royal prerogative. During this brief respite from internal discord, the mind of the nation became, as it were, conscious of its strength, and among a host of lesser luminaries, hailed, as its chief glory, "the miracle of Stratford."

With the death of Elizabeth a change came over the scene; the new king, by his ostentatious assumption of sovereignty, beyond the control of law, alike in civil and ecclesiastical affairs, ran counter to the growing impatience of despotic rule, which, ere long, was to find such eloquent expression through the voice of Sir John

Eliot and his political compeers. The policy of Charles I. was as completely opposed to the national will as had been that of his predecessor. Coming events cast their shadows before them, and amid the stern realities of actual life, men lost their relish for adventure and romance. Hampden and Pym became the popular heroes, men of a very different type from Sir Philip Sidney and Sir Walter Raleigh, the favourites of the Elizabethan age. The political storm, the first muttering of which had been heard two centuries before, when Wyclif grappled with Sacerdotalism, and when the peasants rose against their feudal lords, now burst forth with irrepressible fury, ending, after the varied vicissitudes of the Civil War, with the temporary triumph of the Republic and of Puritanism.

Into that struggle Milton threw himself with passionate intensity. "I resolved," he says, "though then meditating other matters, to transfer to this struggle all my genius, and all the strength of my industry." His enthusiasm for the cause of freedom, civil and religious, may be estimated by the greatness of the sacrifices which he offered at her shrine.

Having from early manhood regarded poetry as his vocation, all his efforts were directed to qualify himself for what he considered his heaven-appointed mission; accordingly, having in his twenty-first year, produced his "Hymn on the Nativity," thus giving promise of his future greatness, he retired, in his twenty-fourth year, to his beloved seclusion at Horton, and during his six years residence there, he composed "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Arcades," "Comus," and "Lycidas." So far, however, from considering his poetic equipment as complete, in a letter addressed to his friend, Charles Diodate, after leaving Horton he writes as follows: "But what am I doing? I am pluming my wings and preparing to fly: but my Pegasus has not yet feathers enough to bear it aloft."

Accordingly, with a view of completing his education, he embarked upon a continental tour. A scholar, saturated with classic lore, he could not, without a pang,

have relinquished the prospect of visiting Athens, and other scenes of classical celebrity. Hearing, however, during his travels, of the troubled state of affairs in England, he renounced his intention of visiting Greece, and turned his face homeward. "I considered it dishonourable," he says, "to be enjoying myself abroad, while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom at home."

His second sacrifice made in the cause of liberty, was an instance of still greater self-denial. On the convocation of the long Parliament in 1640, the year after his return to England, relinquishing for a time his intention of writing a great poem, he devoted himself to the publication of his controversial pamphlets, and pleaded the cause of civil and religious freedom through the medium of prose, "a manner of writing," as he himself tells us, "wherein, knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account, but of my left hand."

His determination, on his return from the Continent, to devote his energies to the composition of a great poem, his preparatory labours being now completed, "appears from the list of subjects, ninety-nine in number, including 'Paradise Lost,' drawn up by him, at this period, and which may be seen in MS. in the Library at Trinity College, Cambridge." With what reluctance he abandoned his fondly cherished dream, appears from the following noble passage.

"I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and harsh disputes, put from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the still air of delightful studies. . .

"But were it the meanest under service, if God, by his secretary conscience, enjoined it, it were sad for me if I were to draw back."

Still more costly was his third great sacrifice, made in

the interest of the Commonwealth. A vindication of Charles I. having appeared from the pen of Salmasius, Milton, who in 1649 became Latin secretary to the Commonwealth, was ordered by the council, "to prepare something in reply." He had been warned by his physicians that the effort would irreparably cost him his sight. In spite of this warning, with heroic self-sacrifice he undertook the task. "My resolution," he writes, "was unshaken, though the alternative was either the loss of my sight, or the desertion of my duty. I would not have listened to the voice of Esculapius himself from the shrine of Epidaurus, in preference to the suggestions of the heavenly monitor within my breast."

Milton reflected, in its gradual development, the highest consciousness of Puritan England in the seventeenth century.

Its passionate love of civil freedom; its severe morality; its recognition of the indissoluble relation of the soul to God; its abhorrence of episcopal tyranny, and repudiation of secular authority in spiritual concerns; all these found a vehement advocate in him.

How completely Milton's genius was in harmony with the grave and earnest spirit of the age appears even in his earlier poems, "Comus," and "Lycidas," composed in the sweet retirement of Horton. "Comus" is justly regarded as one of the most perfect poems in the English language. Nothing can exceed the exquisite beauty, not only of the whole, but also of the individual parts; "it is impossible," to quote the words of Mr. George Saintsbury, "to single out passages, for the whole is golden." The versification is perfect, while the fundamental idea embodied in the poem is that which lies at the very root of Puritanism, namely, the inveterate struggle between right and wrong, between good and evil, which subsequently found such sublime expression in "Paradise Lost."

While giving expression to the elevation of sentiment, and intense moral earnestness which are among the most striking characteristics of Puritanism, this charm-

ing masque bears witness also to the more liberal spirit which distinguished the earlier, or, as it may be styled, the Spenserian type of Puritanism, which was not incompatible with the keenest appreciation of beauty, in nature, in literature, and in art.

In "Lycidas," an exquisite monody, wherein Milton bewails the death of his friend, Edward King, there are indications that the poet was no stranger to the stern and bitter temper which was beginning to animate his co-religionists.

"Lycidas," it must be remembered, was published in 1638, while in 1637, the persecution of the Puritans was at its height. In the latter year, Bastwick and Burton, in the presence of immense crowds, had their ears cropped; Prynne not only lost his ears, but was twice branded on the cheek; other outrages were committed on the persons of Puritans, and numbers were pilloried. In the same year "Laud had attempted to force his new Episcopalian service-book upon Scotland." It cannot, therefore, excite surprise that the tone of grave and tender lament which pervades the elegy should be broken by a sudden flash of indignant scorn at the dangers which surrounded the Church; at the "blind mouths that scarce themselves know how to hold a sheephook," and to whom "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed," while "the grim wolf of Rome, with privy paw, daily devours apace, and nothing said." "The stern resolve of the people to demand justice on their tyrants spoke in his threat of the axe."

"Strafford and Laud, and even Charles himself had yet to reckon with 'that two-handed engine at the door, which stood ready to smite once and smite no more.'"¹

In passing through the fiery ordeal of fierce and relentless persecution, the character of Puritanism was changed, and, in its hour of triumph it exhibited that stern fanaticism, and narrow-minded bigotry, which are repugnant to the genius of the English people.

During the prolonged period of Milton's political

¹ "History of the English People." John Richard Green.

activity, his poetical genius found expression only through his sonnets which, though few in number, are worthy of their author. Thus, in his noble lines on "The late Massacre in Piedmont," we recognize the voice which, in "Lycidas," had entered the poet's indignant protest against the abuses in the Church. Well might Wordsworth exclaim :

"Scorn not the sonnet critic !

When a damp

Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
Soul-animating strains, alas ! too few."

Regret has frequently been expressed that, for so many years, Milton, in the uncongenial sphere of politics, should have expended energies which might have given birth to another immortal poem. For my part, I cannot share this regret; his prose pamphlets, deplorable as are the rudeness and scurrility by which many of their pages are disfigured, contain passages of such surpassing grandeur and beauty that their loss would deprive our literature of some of its most precious jewels. "Now and then the gnarled sticks of controversy turn to golden arrows of Phœbus in his trembling hands, singing as they fly, and carrying their messages of doom in music."

They are, moreover, essentially autobiographical; the glimpses which they afford of the poet's personal history, of his lofty aims in life, of his high ideal as to the function of poetry, are unspeakably precious, nor can we estimate the influence exerted upon his contemporaries by the example there set forth of unswerving allegiance to duty, and devotion, at whatever cost, to what he believed to be the cause of God. Nor must it be forgotten that his "Areopagitica," of which it has been said that "none of his writings contains so many seminal sentences, pithy embodiments of vital truths," remains, to this day, the ablest vindication of the freedom of the press.

Independently of these considerations, it is my belief also, that in doing stern battle with tyranny and wrong, his own spirit was braced and strengthened, and that, had he kept aloof from the fierce struggle which then convulsed his native land, his poetical genius would never have risen to the sublime height which it achieved in "Paradise Lost" and "Samson Agonistes."

At the Restoration, Milton shared the overthrow of the Puritan party. He was arrested and for a short time suffered imprisonment; an amnesty having been at length procured, he retired to a humble dwelling in Bunhill Fields, where, with the exception of the time spent at Chalfont St. Giles' at the time of the Great Plague, he resided till his death in 1674.

History presents few sublimer spectacles than Milton, in the solitary grandeur of his latter days; "poor, sick, old, blind, slandered, persecuted," yet, as Coleridge says, "still listening to the music of his own thoughts," and, instead of being overwhelmed by his afflictions, coming forth from the fiery furnace with heightened majesty and power.

It was during the first seven years of loneliness and retirement that he composed his immortal poem, "Paradise Lost," which, while classical in form, thus bearing witness to the influence of the Renaissance, has been appropriately characterized as the "Epic of Puritanism." Four years later, he published his "Paradise Regained."

In the whole range of literature, there is no grander conception than Milton's Satan, the perfect embodiment of pride, of unconquerable will:

"And courage never to submit or yield,
And what is else not to be overcome."

His solitary compeer is the Prometheus of Æschylus; the Titan's sublime soliloquy, wherein, when left alone, chained to the solitary Caucasian crag, he hurls defiance at his hated foe, is paralleled by the ruined archangel's apostrophe to Hell, on taking possession of his gloomy reign.

“Hail, horrors, hail!
 Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
 Receive thy new possessor; one who brings
 A mind not to be chang'd by place or time.
 The mind is its own place, and in itself
 Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
 What matter where, if I be still the same.

Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
 'To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell;
 Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.”

“The all-enduring, all-defying pride of Satan, assuming so majestically Hell's burning throne, and coveting the diadem which scorches his thunder-blasted brow, is a creation requiring in its author almost the spiritual energy with which he invests the fallen seraph.”

“What chains us as with a resistless spell in such a character, is spiritual might made visible by the racking pains which it overpowers. There is something kindling and ennobling in the consciousness, however awakened, of the energy which resides in mind; and many a virtuous man has borrowed new strength from the force, constancy, and dauntless courage of evil agents.”¹

Wonderful is the contrast between the terrible sublimity of Hell and the exquisite beauty of the earthly Paradise, which harmonizes with the wedded bliss of Adam and Eve:

“Imparadised in one another's arms.”

An idyllic picture, invested with ideal beauty and poetic charm.

Milton shared the Puritan belief in the supreme authority of Scripture, as the direct revelation of the Most High; hence, in selecting as the subject of his great poem the history of Man's Fall, as recorded in the Book of Genesis, he believed that he was giving utterance to eternal truth.

Milton's infallible Bible, like Dante's infallible Church, when viewed in the light of modern thought, belong, however, to a bygone age. Nevertheless, while the

¹ W. E. Channing, D.D.

theology of "Paradise Lost," like that of the "Divina Commedia," no longer harmonizes with the spirit of the age, the work of the English, like that of the Italian bard, takes rank among the master-works of song, as vital forces, tending from age to age to uplift the human soul upon the wing of lofty enthusiasm above the trivial and the mean, and to bring home to our hearts a sense of the infinite mystery by which our little life on earth is encompassed.

In his last work, "Samson Agonistes," we have, to quote the words of Mr. Mark Pattison, "the utterance of his final period of solitary and Promethean grandeur when, blind, destitute, friendless, he testified of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, alone before a fallen world." This sublime tragedy is, moreover, deeply interesting from another point of view; while justly characterized "as the intensest utterance of the most intense of English poets," it has also been pronounced, by so competent a critic as Goethe, "to have more of the antique spirit than any production of any other modern poet. He is very great."

According to Mr. Lowell, however, the German poet, while appreciating Milton's success, failed to see the reason of it. "Milton not only subjected himself to the structural requirements of the Attic tragedy, but, with the true poetic instinct, availed himself of the striking advantage it had in the choice of a subject. No popular tradition lay near enough to him for his purpose; none united in itself the essential requisites of human interest and universal belief. He accordingly chose a Jewish Mythos, very near to his own heart as a blind prisoner, betrayed by his wife, among the Philistines of the Restoration, and familiar to the earliest associations of his hearers. This subject, and this alone, met all the demands both of living poetic production and of antique form,—the action grandly simple, the personages few, the protagonist at once a victim of Divine judgment, and an executor of Divine retribution, an intense personal sympathy in the poet himself, and no strangeness

to the habitual prepossessions of those he addressed to be overcome before he could touch their hearts, or be sure of aid from their imaginations. Accordingly, the 'Agonistes' is still fresh and strong as morning."

It reveals, moreover, that while to the last his artistic proclivities were in harmony with the master-works of classical antiquity, his deepest sympathies were with the spirit of Judaism. Doubtless in his hero, the blind captive of Gaza,

"Fallen on evil days and evil tongues,
With darkness and with danger compassed round,"

he saw not only himself, but the ruined cause which he had so much at heart.

"The English nation in the age of Charles II. is to him the enslaved and erring Samson,—a Samson, however, ready to burst his bonds and bring down ruin upon Philistia."¹

While, like the Elizabethan poets, endowed with intensity, pathos, sympathy with nature, graceful fancy, and magnificent imagination, Milton was at the same time free from the irregularities and extravagances by which their poetry was too frequently disfigured. Nor was he deficient in dramatic power, as shown by the wonderful debate in Pandemonium, where the characters of the demons are with consummate skill revealed through their several discourses.

He had, moreover, that amplitude of vision which distinguished the great men of the previous generation; "there are no such vistas and avenues of verse as his, whether of space or time."

While thus carrying on the glorious traditions of the Elizabethan period, the exquisite music of his verse, with its rich and varied harmonies, reveal a mastery over the English language transcending that displayed by the poets of the so-called English Augustine age. He may thus be regarded as bridging over the interval

¹ "Life of John Milton." Richard Garnett, LL.D.

between the poets of the sixteenth and those of the later decades of the seventeenth century, who succeeded in throwing off the trammels imposed upon English poetry by the contemporaries and by the immediate successors of Milton.

The poems of Milton are interesting also from another point of view, as illustrating the length of time which frequently elapses between the publication of a scientific truth and its universal recognition. Thus, as stated above, the Copernican system, which revolutionized men's conception of the universe, had been expounded at Oxford by Giordano Bruno, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, yet in Milton, the contemporary of Galileo, writing in his old age, we are presented, as his most recent editor notes, "with the interesting phenomenon of a mind apparently uncertain to the last which of the two systems, the Ptolemaic or the Copernican, was the true one, or perhaps beginning to be persuaded of the higher probability of the Copernican, but yet retaining the Ptolemaic for poetical purposes." I am tempted to quote the description of the two theories given by the Archangel in his discourse with Adam, whom he admonishes "to be lowly wise," and to content himself with the knowledge which lies within his reach.

"Whether the sun, predominant in Heaven,
Rise on the earth ; or earth rise on the sun ;
He from the earth his flaming road begin ;
Or she from west her silent course advance,
With inoffensive pace that spinning sleeps
On her soft axle, while she paces even,
And bears thee soft with the smooth air along ;
Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid ;
Leave them to God above ; Him serve and fear."
("Paradise Lost," bk. viii.)

Happily the angel's warning would now be out of place. The scientific discoverer is no longer impeded in his career by the dread "of things remote from use, obscure and subtle ;" nevertheless, a certain reluctance is very generally felt to the acceptance of scientific truths,

which, being at variance with preconceived theories of the external universe, are regarded as hostile to the religious convictions of the day,—this reluctance will continue to be felt so long as theological dogmas are out of harmony with the intelligence of the age, nor will it subside till the universal recognition of the great principle that the discoveries of science and the truths of religion, being divers revelations of the one Infinite Mind, cannot be antagonistic the one to the other.

On bidding farewell to Milton, before tracing the rise of the so-called classical school of English poetry, it will be necessary to dwell briefly upon the contemporary dramatic literature of France.

THE FRENCH DRAMATISTS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

Corneille, 1606-1684. | Racine, 1637-1699.
Molière, 1620-1673.

A NEW epoch in English literature was inaugurated at the Restoration, when, through the influence of the Court, and of the Royalist party, including several English poets who, during the exile of the Royal family, had attached themselves to Henrietta Maria, French taste became paramount, and impressed itself alike upon the manners, the language, and the literature of the age.

Since Chaucer, who was saturated alike with the poetry of France and of Italy, the English poets had drawn their inspiration more largely from Italian and Spanish, than from Gallic sources; the poetry of Spenser and Milton bearing witness to their familiarity with the great works of Italian song. The closer intimacy between France and England, consequent upon the Restoration, tended to introduce into the latter country the study of the French classics, which, embracing the works of Descartes, Pascal, Fénelon, La Fontaine, Bossuet, and of many other celebrities, together with the dramas of Corneille, Racine and Molière, could not fail to enrich our national genius.

Poets and poetry being my theme, I must confine my attention to the French dramatists of the seventeenth century, whose works are, however, so well known that I shall merely endeavour to indicate, very briefly, a few

of their leading characteristics. Very grievous were the fetters imposed upon the dramatic poets of France by their rigid observance of the unities, to which, from their reverence for classical antiquity, they clung with passionate devotion.

Fatal also to the development of the highest dramatic genius was the all-pervading influence of the court, which tended, not only to banish from the stage every manifestation of passion and of emotion out of harmony with the conventional manners of the period, but also to restrict, within a very narrow range, the characters and situations which were there represented.

Pierre Corneille, the earliest French dramatist of note, born in 1606, after writing a few comedies of no special interest, suddenly achieved popularity by the production of "*The Cid*," which, on its first appearance, was hailed with enthusiasm, and which, after the lapse of more than 200 years, still ranks among the master-works of French literature. Founded on the Spanish drama of Guellan de Castro, it is pervaded by the spirit of chivalry and romance which, at that time, characterized the literature of Spain, and, in many important particulars, Corneille has surpassed his Spanish model. It must, however, be confessed that, notwithstanding its great and varied beauties, this noble drama strikingly exhibits the fatal effects resulting from adherence to the unity of time.

Chemene, the heroine, returns the love of Roderigo, whose suit is approved by his father, Don Diego; the Count de Gomes, father of Chemene, exasperated by the preference shown for Don Diego by the king strikes him in the royal presence.

Don Diego calls upon his son to avenge the insult, who, heart-stricken by the duty imposed upon him, determines, nevertheless, to vindicate his father's honour, and, meeting Count de Gomes in a duel, kills him. In the Spanish drama, the struggle between the conflicting passions of love, honour, and filial duty, which agitate the heart of Chemene, is prolonged for several months;

during the interval, Roderigo gains a splendid victory over the Moors, triumphs in single combat over the Arroganese giant, Don Martin, is honoured as the saviour of his country, and wins the gratitude of the king. We are thus prepared for the denouement; and the ultimate triumph, in the heart of Chemene, of love over what she regarded as paternal duty, does not appear unnatural.

In the French drama, on the contrary, the events of the story, the insult, the death of the Count, the flight of Rodrigo, his brilliant victory over the Moors, are all crowded into the narrow space of four and twenty hours. Still more unnatural is the consent of Chemene to accept the hand of Roderigo, while the body of her father still lies unburied.

Feelings of unreality and of improbability are thus awakened, and we are disposed to acquiesce in the judgment passed on the drama by the Academy; that, "from the fear of sinning against the rules of art, the poet has rather chosen to sin against the rules of Nature."

Corneille's next master-work, "*Horace*," represents, under another aspect, the same terrible struggle between love and duty, which forms the ground-work of "*The Cid*," and strikingly illustrates, in the characters of the elder and the younger "*Horace*," the typical Roman of the olden time, whose stern patriotism subordinated to the interest of Rome the most sacred affections of the human heart.

"*Polyeucte*" transports us to a different scene, and exhibits christian heroism triumphant over conjugal affection and worldly ambition; among the remaining characters of the drama which, like all the creations of the poet, are ideal rather than real, Pauline and Severus are especially noteworthy. From this brief notice of Corneille's three master-works, it appears that his most striking characteristic is moral elevation; hence his portraiture of heroism under every variety of circumstance, tends to strengthen our belief in human virtue, and bears witness to the innate nobleness of the poet's soul.

It is an interesting fact that within five and twenty years after the appearance of "Horace" at Paris, three translations were made for the English stage.

"The interest in the French drama felt on this side the Channel is also attested by the immense success which attended the performance, on the Dublin stage, of Corneille's 'Pompée,' produced there in 1663, through the medium of a translation, and which, in print, met with an enthusiastic reception in London."

Racine, born in 1639, Corneille's successor as the leading tragic dramatist in France, entertaining a passionate enthusiasm for classical antiquity, was even more rigid in his observance of the unities than his predecessor, and cherished moreover a fervent desire to reproduce, upon the modern stage, subjects already treated by the Greek tragedians, especially by Euripides. It must be confessed that many of his efforts in that direction were far from successful; illustrating only too forcibly the truth of Schlegel's remark, that "antiquity was only used by him, as a thin veil, under which the modern French character could be distinctly recognized;" nevertheless, notwithstanding his occasional failures, through his felicity of diction; his skill in the construction of his plots; his genuine poetic feeling; his tenderness and power of characterization, he has, in his master-works succeeded not only in triumphing over the limitations imposed upon his genius by the observance of the unities, but also in breathing the breath of life into the characters of a bygone age. In illustration of this remark we may compare "The Andromaque" of Racine with the drama of the same name by Euripides, when it will, I think, appear that, in the portraiture of the two principal characters, the preference must be given to the poet of France. His Trojan matron, the widow of Hector, and mother of Astyanax, a character of great dignity and nobleness, more worthily represents the Andromache of the "Iliad," in her grand simplicity, than does the Andromache of Euripides. Racine's Hermione, moreover, in whom the conflicting passions

of love and hate, by which she is violently agitated, are very powerfully drawn, awakens our sympathy and interest; while for the Hermione of Euripides, we feel, in the earlier scenes of the drama, abhorrence, and subsequently contempt.

Again in his tragedy of "Phedre," Racine deviates widely from the "Hippolytus" of Euripides, upon which it is founded. The son of Theseus, the hero of the Greek drama, the woman-hater, who would have annihilated the whole female sex, as man's greatest bane; who falls a victim to the vengeance of Aphrodite, and is glorified at last by the intervention of Artemis, and in whom centres the interest of the play, would have been out of place upon the modern stage, and it must be confessed that this grand classical figure is very inadequately represented by the Hippolytus of Racine.

His Phedre, on the contrary, though differing widely from the Phedre of Euripides is very finely drawn.

In the Greek drama, the wife of Theseus, through the letter found in her dead hand, becomes the accuser of his son. In the French drama, where the inward struggles of her fiery nature are drawn with great energy, we follow, with the deepest interest, the conflicting emotions by which her whole being is convulsed, till in the end, having taken poison, she bears witness against herself, and reveals to Theseus the innocence of Hippolytus. This brief comparison between the dramas of Racine and Euripides, which cannot here be pursued at greater length, will suffice to show that the French dramatist was by no means the mere servile copyist of his Hellenic model.

The distinguished merit of "Britannicus," as a faithful historical picture of Imperial Rome, under Nero, is very generally admitted, together with its accurate portraiture of the leading personages of that tragic period; upon this and Racine's other historical dramas, I must not linger, but will pass on to notice, very briefly, his last, and unquestionably his greatest, dramatic work, namely, his "Athalie," respecting which Schlegel declares that

"of all the French tragedies, it approaches the most nearly to the grand style of the Greek."

In addition to the superiority of "*Athalie*" as a work of art, and to its significance as the vehicle of religious truth, deep interest attaches to this drama, as sounding, unconsciously, the first note of the coming Revolution. While listening to the following words, spoken by the prophet Joad, who could avoid applying them to the absolute power wielded by Louis XIV., together with the terrible sufferings of the people, consequent upon his policy, and which, in the following century, were to bring his descendant to the block?

"De l'absolu pouvoir vous ignorez l'ivresse,
Et des lâches flatteurs la voix enchanteress.
Bientôt ils vous diront que les plus saintes lois,
Maitresses du vil peuple, obéissent aux rois;
Qu'un roi n'a d'autre frein que sa volonté même;
Qu'il doit immoler tout à sa grandeur suprême;
Qu'aux larmes, au travail, le peuple est condamné,
Et d'un sceptre de fer veut être gouverné;
Que s'il n'est opprimé, tôt ou tard il opprime."¹

("Athalie," Act iv. Sc. 4.)

In this drama Racine reveals a God who compassionates the poor, and who punishes the iniquity of the great; a doctrine unacceptable doubtless to the autocrat of France, and which accounts for the ill-success of the drama, and the subsequent disgrace of the poet.

In considering Racine in connection with the progress of humanity, we must recognize to his honour, that, unlike some of his brother poets in England, while writing for a corrupt court, he never pandered to its vices; though he did not, like Corneille, aspire to delineate human nature under its more heroic aspects, his dramas, nevertheless, were distinguished for their moral purity, and for their truthful delineation of the more tender and delicate sentiments of the human heart.

Moreover, possessed by a passion for classical antiquity, the two leading dramatists of France were led, as

¹ See "*Histoire de la Litterature Française.*" Eugène Gerizez.

we have seen, to reproduce upon the modern stage, the remarkable events and personages of Hellenic mythology and of Roman history, thus popularizing an important phase of human civilization, and revivifying, as it were, the typical characters of a bygone age. How powerful was the influence exercised by the tragic poets of France upon the national genius, appears in the lives of Mme. Roland and her contemporaries, who, during the horrors of the Revolution, aimed at exhibiting, in life and in death, the dauntless courage, and the heroic self-sacrifice which had distinguished the heroes and heroines of classical antiquity.

While paying due honour to the great tragedians of France, it must be acknowledged that the artificial taste which, during the later decades of the seventeenth, and the earlier decades of the eighteenth century, characterized the literature of England, was, as remarked above, intensified by their influence. To this artificial taste must be ascribed the prolonged neglect of Shakespeare, together with the toleration extended to the liberties taken with our great national poet by Garrick, who on the occasion of his Shakespearian revivals in the eighteenth century, boasted that he had "cleared 'Hamlet' from the rubbish of the fifth act."

In accordance with the observation of Schlegel, the unities of time and place, which are inimical to the highest forms of tragedy, have in France been applied advantageously to comedy, of which Molière is the typical representative.

It is a curious fact that under an absolute monarch, like Louis XIV., the great French comedian should, in the exercise of his art, have enjoyed absolute freedom, and should have exercised unlimited control over the social manners of the day.

He was a diligent student of the Spanish dramatists, and also of Plautus, to whom he is indebted for the groundwork of two of his celebrated characters, "L'Etourdi," and "L'Avare."

Endowed with the true genius for comedy, he saw the

weak side of human nature, and has accomplished the difficult task of raising a laugh at the expense of its vices and its weaknesses. This he has done in a gallery of wonderful portraits, which, while drawn from Parisian life, in the seventeenth century, embody, at the same time, the essential features of human nature, and which consequently, like the characters of Shakespeare, are endowed with immortality.

The inveterate enemy of affectation, hypocrisy, and untruth, he has, with consummate skill, held them up to reprobation, under all their varied manifestations, and while ministering most successfully to the amusement of society, he has, at the same time, exercised the function of a teacher and a moralist.

Distinguished alike for good nature and for good sense, while ridiculing, with absolute impartiality, the follies and vices of the various classes of society, including the Bourgeoisie, to which he himself belonged, there is no bitterness in his satire, and while inimitable in the exercise of his art, he is never cynical and never cruel. The works of Molière are, however, so universally known, that to dwell upon them here would be superfluous.

How powerful was the influence exerted by the French comedian upon the English stage, is attested by the remarkable success which attended the performance of Dryden's play, entitled "Sir Martin Mar-all," founded upon Molière's "L'Etourdi."

The following tribute paid to Molière by our English poet, Thompson, is another interesting illustration of the early appreciation, in England, of the great French comedian.

" Molière's scene,
Chastis'd and regular, with well-judged wit,
Not scatter'd wild, and native humour grac'd,
Was life itself."

ENGLAND.

ORIGIN OF THE CLASSICAL SCHOOL OF ENGLISH POETRY.

JOHN DRYDEN.

1631—1700.

BEFORE continuing our survey of the English Poets, it will be necessary to retrace our steps, in order to consider very briefly the origin of the so-called Classical School of Poetry, of which Dryden may justly claim to be the most vigorous, if not the most perfect representative, an honour which must be reserved for Alexander Pope.

The Elizabethan poets, sympathizing intensely with the national life of that wonderful epoch, had, with few exceptions, been characterized by a certain extravagance and exaggeration which, while harmonizing with the spirit of the age, had, in their case, been nobly redeemed by the poetic afflatus by which they were inspired. Subsequently, however, with the gradual division of the English people into two hostile camps, the poets of the seventeenth century, no longer inspired by the grand sentiments of national unity, while losing the poetic fervour which had characterized the Elizabethan era, continued to exhibit, in an exaggerated degree, the defects of their predecessors. At length, however, this lawlessness and irregularity in the domain of poetry, when unredeemed by nobler qualities, became intolerable, and led to a reaction, in which a prominent part was played by Edmund Waller, who, according to Mr.

E. W. Gosse, "was the first English poet to adopt the French fashion of writing in rhymed couplets." After a considerable interval, this novel poetic form was accepted by the poets of the Restoration, "and Waller, who had for years written alone in the French manner, lived to see his experiment universally adopted." To impart to this novel form the highest polish of which it was susceptible came to be regarded as one of the chief functions of the poet. With the adoption of the new versification, the inaugurators of the movement aspired also to give a new direction to poetry, which, during its grander epochs, had been regarded as the vehicle of passion and imagination, and of all the nobler sentiments, aspirations, and affections of human nature. Revealing the inner working of the common human heart, it had appealed to men and women of every age and every clime, and while holding the mirror up to Nature, and reflecting her varied features, had invested them with a spiritual and ideal charm.

Henceforth, under the auspices of the new school, Poetry was no longer to soar into the empyrean, but, with shackled pinions, was to be devoted, for the most part, to secular uses, and to be employed as the most appropriate medium for celebrating the events and discussing the questions of the hour. Andrew Marvell, the high-minded patriot and genuine poet, alone rebelled against the prevailing fashion, and ridiculed the proposal of his contemporaries, thus to degrade poetry by making her the handmaid of politics. At length, however, after the Restoration, he also adopted the rhymed couplet, and gave emphatic evidence in his "Satires," that, notwithstanding his protestations, he had not escaped the prosaic spirit of the age.

Still more remarkable is the fact that Milton himself appears to have been affected by the all-pervading influence; thus only can we account for the remarkable contrast between the profound veneration which found expression in his youthful sonnet:

"What needs my Shakespeare for his honour'd bones?"

and the contemptuous allusion to the works of our great dramatist, contained in the preface to "Samson Agonistes."

The artificial character thus impressed upon English poetry was doubtless intensified by the widely diffused influence of French literature, consequent upon the Restoration. The superficial character of this foreign influence, however, which, while harmonizing with the prevailing fashion in regard to poetic form, allowed free play to the national genius, is apparent from the writings of Dryden, the recognized literary representative of the Restoration period.

As the poet of a transitional age, Dryden occupies a unique position in our literary history, and in order to appreciate the important service which he rendered to English literature, it will be necessary to consider very briefly a few of his principal works.

The moral corruption which characterized the Restoration period was reflected only too faithfully upon the stage; while Milton was composing his noble tragedy, the final effort of his genius, the Muse of English dramatic poetry was being dragged down into the lowest depths of moral degradation; nor, as a dramatic writer, in regard to the prevailing licentiousness, did Dryden rise above his contemporaries, to whom, however, he set a noble example by the candour with which he acknowledged his error, and by the depth and fervour of his contrition. When Collier published his "Short view of the immorality and profaneness of the English stage," Congreve and Vanburgh attempted an apology: "Dryden accepted the reproof." . . . "Even while he had pandered to the taste of the times, he had been conscious of his treachery to the cause of true art, and had broken out in the following fine passage in his 'Ode to the memory of Mrs. Killigrew:'

'O gracious God! How far have we
Profaned Thy heavenly gift of poesy;
Made prostitute and profligate the muse,
Debased to each obscene and impious use!'"

In the preface to his fables he thus writes: "I am sensible, as I ought to be, of the scandal I have given by my loose writings, and make what reparation I am able by this public acknowledgment;" and he continues, with reference to Collier's attack:

"In many things he has taxed me justly, and I have pleaded guilty to all thought and expression of mine which can be truly argued of obscenity, profaneness, and immorality, and retract them. If he be my enemy let him triumph; if he be my friend, as I have given him no personal occasion to be otherwise, he will be glad of my repentance." This penitential attitude is worthy of the poet, who, notwithstanding his grievous aberrations, never lost all trace of his Puritan upbringing.

Moreover, while the other poets of the Restoration period sneered at the great writers of the Elizabethan era, whom they stigmatized as barbarians, Dryden, true to the traditions of his earlier days, was an ardent admirer and diligent student of Chaucer and Spenser; upon Shakespeare he pronounced a noble panegyric, and in Milton's "Paradise Lost," he saw "one of the greatest, most noble, and sublime poems which either this age or nation hath produced."

In accordance with the fashion of the time, he adopted the Iambic distich, making it the vehicle of his first important satirical poem, which appeared at a remarkable crisis in our national history. The question as to the succession to the throne was paramount; the great body of the nation, dreading a catholic king, clamoured for the exclusion of the Duke of York; while one party was for devolving his right on his daughter Mary, married to William of Orange, Shaftesbury bent all his energies to secure the accession of Monmouth, the eldest of the King's bastards. At this juncture the popular mind was driven almost to frenzy by the supposed discovery of a Popish plot to assassinate the king and thus make way for the Duke of York.

Gradually, however, the panic subsided; the nation, dreading a new civil war, especially when a son would

appear in arms against his father, responded to the appeal of Charles, who was for maintaining inviolate the order of hereditary succession; Shaftesbury was thrown into the tower, and the popular feeling found expression in Dryden's remarkable poem, "Absalom and Achitophel." In this poem, under the transparent disguise of biblical history, he describes the struggle which then agitated the national mind, and in a series of brilliant portraits, which have been justly characterized as typical as well as individual, he graphically portrays the leading characters of the period. Very noteworthy are the moderation and the self-control wherewith his fiery invective and the fervour of his royalistic zeal are subordinated to the main object of his poem, which was to secure the condemnation of Shaftesbury.

When we realize the vital interest of the subject, the excited state of public feeling, together with Dryden's transcendent power as a satirist, we can understand the immense effect which it produced and also its immediate popularity.

Passing over "The Medal" and "Mac Flecknoe," one of the most striking utterances of Dryden's satirical genius, displaying in an eminent degree his titanic strength, his flexibility, impetuosity, and trenchant wit, his next important work is "Religio Laici," a theological treatise in verse, written to support the claims of the Anglican Church, while in "The Hind and the Panther," by some critics regarded as his master-work, he argues in favour of the Roman Catholic communion, to which, after the accession of James II., he had attached himself.

In this remarkable poem, the various sections of the Christian Church are symbolized by various animals, among which "the milk-white Hind," "helpless and persecuted," represents Catholicism, while Prelacy appears under the semblance of the Panther, "externally beautiful, yet ferocious when aroused." The Presbyterian, the Anabaptist, the Independent, the Socinian, the Quaker, and the Atheist figure respectively as the wolf, the boar,

the bear, the fox, the hare, and the monkey, while James appears as "the generous 'royal lion,' trying to protect the various animals under his rule."¹

Unlike the "Absalom and Achitophel," which gave expression to the popular sentiment of the period, "The Hind and the Panther" was out of harmony with the Anti-Catholic spirit then prevalent in England, and may have tended to produce that union of the protestant sects against James which resulted in his deposition.

In addition to his political and controversial poems, his numerous satires, odes, dramas, translations, and fables, together with his prefaces, and other prose works, bear witness to Dryden's indefatigable literary industry during a period of forty years.

The prevailing tone, alike in morality and religion, in political and social life, during the epoch of English history of which, under some of its aspects, Dryden was the representative, was decidedly low; while amid the virulence of party and personal hatred which characterized the age, the higher and nobler elements in human nature, seldom found occasion to assert themselves.

Accordingly, in Dryden's works we look in vain for the highest order of poetry. He appeals to reason rather than to imagination, and to the head rather than to the heart; by him poetry was made subservient to politics and to religious polemics, and, addressing himself with his varied intellectual gifts to the leading topics of the day, literature, under his auspices, became for the first time a great political power. How fully this power was recognized in the succeeding generation, is shown by the liberal patronage and high social position assigned to men of letters by the ministers of Queen Anne.

As the author of our greatest political satire, and of his two famous odes, Dryden occupies a distinguished place among the poets of England; it is, however, as a

¹ "Literary Influence in British History." Hon. A. S. G. Canning.

great artificer in language that he has rendered special service to English literature.

In a letter addressed to Mrs. Steward, written shortly before his death, he speaks of himself as "a man who has done his best to improve the language, especially in poetry," and for his achievement in this direction, he deserves the gratitude of posterity.

While cordially accepting Mr. Swinburne's verdict, the "he (Dryden) has added a new and a majestic note, if not one of the sweeter or profounder, to the harmonies of English verse," I cannot recognize the justice of Dr. Johnson's celebrated dictum, that "he (Dryden) found English brick and left it marble."

The stately periods of Hooker, of Milton, and of Jeremy Taylor, may be compared, not inappropriately, to a material, noble and beautiful indeed, but too costly for ordinary use; an image totally inapplicable to the language which, principally through Dryden's agency, had acquired that clearness, flexibility and precision which rendered it an instrument admirably adapted to meet the requirements of popular literature. The transformation thus wrought in English prose, which formed so striking a characteristic of the age, was doubtless greatly accelerated by the colloquial use of the French language by the upper classes, consequent upon the Restoration.

When we remember the important part about to be played in national education, by the essayist, the journalist, and the pamphleteer, the services rendered by Dryden, in this direction, cannot easily be over-estimated.

ALEXANDER POPE.

1688-1744.

DRYDEN was succeeded by Pope, who, in his twelfth year, was taken to see the elder poet, to whom he looked up with reverence, as his master in the art of versification.

Born in the year of the Revolution, and with a genius singularly precocious, he became the poetical representative of the reign of Queen Anne, a period distinguished by its intellectual activity, and remarkable for the sudden outburst of literary ability, which has stamped it as the Augustine age of English literature. It was, nevertheless, an age essentially prosaic; conventional in its morality; colourless in its theology; materialistic in its philosophy; and in manners polished and artificial; while from Addison, and other contemporary writers, we learn that society had not yet emerged from the moral corruption introduced at the Restoration.

In such an age the higher flights of imagination would have been out of place, and accordingly Pope, the wit, the critic, and the man of the world, though destitute of the higher attributes of genius, was, by his peculiar gifts and aptitudes, especially fitted to be its representative.

By him poetry was employed as the vehicle for translation, for moral disquisition, for the solution of philosophical problems, and more especially for satire, of which he was a consummate master. Accordingly, his pictures of the social life and manners of the age, together with his portraits of contemporary celebrities, which are invested with historical interest, are justly regarded as his most valuable contribution to our national literature.

His "Pastorals," published in 1709, and his "Essay on Criticism," in 1711, established his reputation as a poet. To these productions may be applied the words of

Leslie Stephen, describing in general terms the character of Pope's writing; as "polished prose, with occasional gleams of genuine poetry." They were followed by "The Rape of the Lock," regarded by some critics as the most characteristic expression of his genius. Fancy and imagination, which are essential elements in the poet's nature, even when that nature is not of the highest order, can invest with a certain charm even the most unpromising subject, and accordingly "The Rape of the Lock," pronounced by De Quincey to be "the most exquisite monument of playful fancy that universal literature offers," is by many critics regarded as the poet's master-work. It is undoubtedly the work of a consummate artist, in which, as in a polished mirror, we see reflected the artificial society of the period; its beaux, with their periwigs and sword-knots; its belles, with their flounces and furbelows; puffs, powders, patches, bibles, billets-doux; a period which, notwithstanding the outward polish and brilliant wit by which it was distinguished, is there represented in its true character, as heartless, frivolous and corrupt.

The contempt for women, which, like a tainted atmosphere, pervades the entire poem, aptly characterized as "the apotheosis of foppery and folly," is a sure indication of a low moral tone, alike in the poet himself, and in the society which he depicts.

Wonderful indeed is the contrast between the artificial manners depicted in "The Rape of the Lock," and the simple, though semi-barbarous customs of the Homeric times, as reflected in the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey," Pope's translation of which, though superseded by more faithful versions of the original, cannot but be regarded as a most important contribution to the literature of his own day.

The familiar heroic couplet in which they were reproduced would doubtless be more acceptable to his contemporaries than the more ponderous verse of Chapman, while the poems themselves, appealing as they do to the

permanent and universal feelings of the human heart, would be welcomed as a refreshing oasis amid the prosaic literature of the Augustine age.

After devoting ten years to the labour of translation, Pope, returning with renewed vigour to the more congenial task of original composition, produced his "*Dunciad*," which, though published first in 1727, did not appear in its complete form till 1743.

In this poem he wages fierce battle against the Demon of Dulness, impersonated in a host of inferior writers who, for party purposes, degraded literature by making it the vehicle of personal flattery and abuse; against this crowd of dullards, whom he castigates as the inveterate foes of true genius, he brings to bear his terrible powers of sarcasm, in wielding which he rivals Dryden, of whom, in this poem, he is the avowed imitator, not only in brilliant wit but also in coarseness and brutality.

One of Pope's most popular poems, his "*Essay on Man*," embodying Lord Bolingbroke's philosophical system, though valueless as a philosophical treatise, contains passages of great beauty, giving expression to generous and noble sentiments, and may be compared, as suggested by Mr. Mark Pattison, to an exquisite mosaic.

Pope, like Dryden, was an indefatigable writer, and in addition to the above mentioned works, he produced a variety of odes, elegies, satires, and epistles; among the latter, that addressed to Dr. Arbuthnot, or, "*Prologue to the Satires*," containing the celebrated portrait of Addison, is deemed especially noteworthy. This malignant satire, which was regarded with peculiar affection by the author, together with other libels equally rancorous, directed by Pope against his personal and political opponents, appear to me to be singularly characteristic of the ungenerous temper of an age which found another exponent in the cynical misanthropy of Pope's contemporary, Jonathan Swift.

Pope, as before remarked, was a consummate master

of his craft; his wonderful command of language enabled him to compress his thoughts within the narrowest possible compass, making his lines sparkle like gems, while, at the same time, he invested the couplet with the highest musical charm of which it is susceptible. Accordingly his works abound with aphorisms, many of which have passed into our language, and form, as it were, the current coin of ordinary speech.

Perfection, whatsoever the sphere of its manifestation, is precious, and Pope having achieved it in the composition of the heroic couplet, his poems will live, and he himself will hold a place, though a humble one, in "the quire of ever-enduring men."

THE SUCCESSORS OF POPE.

James Thomson, 1700-1748.
William Collins, 1721-1759.

Thomas Gray, 1716-1771.
Oliver Goldsmith, 1728-1774.

✓ DURING the lifetime of Pope there were indications that the so-called Classical school of English poetry, aiming, as its highest goal, at perfection of external form, and uninspired by any genuine enthusiasm, was already on the wane.

The revolt against the prevailing fashion was inaugurated by James Thomson, a Scotchman, who, familiar doubtless with the songs and ballads of his native land, in which the genius of Scotland, characterized by an intense love of Nature, had from age to age found musical expression, was now to give a new direction to the poetry of England.

His "Winter," which he brought in MS. from Scotland, and published in 1726, was followed in 1730 by "The Seasons," founded on the ever-varying phenomena

of Nature, as unfolded in "the ceaseless changes of the rolling year," a theme of permanent and universal interest. Transporting his readers, familiar with the artificial life and literature of the age, into the immediate presence of Nature, he opened to them a fountain of inspiration and enjoyment from which they had long been excluded. Nor was the human element absent from his poetry. His descriptions of Nature, associated with pictures of sheepshearing, harvesting, and other episodes of rural life, are varied by the introduction of human figures, such as the Siberian exile and the traveller lost in the snow, together with narrative episodes, which, however, are not so satisfactory as his purely descriptive passages.

Thomson's "Castle of Indolence," written in the Spenserian stanza, may justly be regarded as his master-work; appealing, however, to a narrower range of emotion than "The Seasons," it has never attained the widespread popularity of the latter poem.

While claiming recognition as the first poet after the Restoration to harbinger the decline of artificiality, and the return to naturalism in poetry, Thomson could not altogether emancipate himself from the false taste of his contemporaries; his poems, accordingly, bearing the impress of the era which gave them birth, are disfigured not unfrequently by meretricious ornament and other blemishes, which, notwithstanding the poet's admirable delineations of Nature, are serious drawbacks to the value of his works.

Three years after Pope's death appeared the beautiful lyrics of Collins, who, dowered with true lyrical genius, carried on the work initiated by Thomson, of liberating poetry from the conventional trammels by which, for upwards of a century, her flight had been impeded.

Very touching is the tribute paid by the younger poet to the memory of his departed friend, in his beautiful "Ode on the death of Mr. Thomson,"—a wreath laid with loving and reverent hand upon the elder poet's sylvan grave.

His "Ode on the Passions," generally regarded as his master-work, together with his "Ode to Evening," significant as exhibiting the blending of sentiment and emotion with the faithful delineation of natural scenery, still hold their place in our literature; while his "Ode to Liberty," especially the opening strophe, is noteworthy as heralding the indignant protests against tyranny and oppression, which have found impassioned utterance through a long roll of English poets, culminating in the "Prometheus Unbound" of Shelley.

Collins was succeeded by Gray, another genuine poet, who had also the reputation of being the most learned man in Europe. Professing the greatest admiration for the poetry of Dryden, he maintained that, "if there was any excellence in his own numbers, he had learned it wholly from that great poet." The effect of this admiration manifests itself in his poems, which, to a certain extent, bear the impress of the Classical school. Nevertheless, like those of his predecessors, they mark a decided progress towards the less conventional poetry of the succeeding age. His "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," published in 1747, was followed by his "Hymn to Adversity," and his "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard,"—a beautiful poem to which special interest attaches, not only as a perfect work of art, but also as giving expression to those broader human sympathies which were beginning to supersede the narrow exclusiveness and aristocratic assumptions characteristic of the earlier decades of the century.

Gray's translations from the Norse opened the rich mine of Scandinavian literature, which has been so profitably worked by his successors, while his Pindaric Odes are valuable, as having enriched our literature with new poetic forms of great variety and beauty. How little they were appreciated by his contemporaries appears from the following passage from Johnson's "Life of Gray." "In 1757 Gray published 'The Progress of Poetry,' and 'The Bard,' two compositions at

which the readers of poetry were at first content to gaze in mute amazement." "Some hardy champions undertook to rescue them from neglect, and in a short time many were content to be shown beauties which they could not see."¹

Another poet, born in an unpoetic age, was Oliver Goldsmith, who, inveighing against the novel forms of verse, introduced by Collins and Gray, returned to the heroic couplet, in his mastery over which he rivals even Pope himself.

His first important work, "The Traveller," published in 1764, a didactic and descriptive poem, illustrates not only the poet's enjoyment of nature, but also his genuine sympathy with the common joys and sorrows of humanity, under every variety of national costume; while his graphic descriptions of foreign scenery and modes of life, enable the reader to share his gratification as, companioned by his flute, he leisurely pursues his solitary way.

After an interval of six years, "The Traveller" was followed by "The Deserted Village," a poem which, appealing to the common heart of humanity, and embodying tender and noble sentiments in musical and graceful verse, continues, like Gray's "Elegy," after the lapse of more than a century, to hold a high place in popular favour. Goldsmith's "Village Preacher," worthy to stand beside Chaucer's "Poor Parson," is one of the most charming figures in our literature.

From this hasty glance at the works of Pope's successors, it appears that, while exhibiting in their versification the perfection regarded by the classical school as the poet's highest aim, they at the same time bore witness to those broader aspects of humanity, and to the higher tone of sentiment, which characterized the later decades of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, being unable to emancipate themselves entirely from the influence of their age, while claiming grateful recognition for the beautiful poems with which they have

¹ Quoted by G. Birkbeck Hill in "Writers and Readers."

enriched our literature, they can hardly be regarded as heralding the wonderful outburst of song, the splendour of which irradiated the beginning of the nineteenth century ; an honour which must be assigned to two poets differing alike in temperament and in nationality, William Cowper and Robert Burns.

WILLIAM COWPER.

1731-1800.

ALTHOUGH the work of a recluse, and strongly imbued with the individuality of their author, the poems of Cowper nevertheless acquire additional interest when studied in connection with the period in which they were produced, the more salient features of which are there faithfully mirrored.

He may indeed be regarded as giving expression to the new and varied enthusiasms which were stirring the heart of England, in its revolt against the corruption, frivolity, cruelty and conventionalism, which since the Restoration, had paralyzed the higher energies and nobler sentiments of the nation. From this spiritual death it had been awakened by the voice of Whitefield and the Wesleys, which, like the blast of the trumpet, sounded throughout the length and breadth of the land.

The religious emotions, deep and impassioned, thus awakened, found expression in the Wesleyan hymnology, which contains devotional poetry of a high order.

Unquestionably, however, the great religious revival of the eighteenth century found its true poetical exponent in Cowper. Though the special form of his religion was Calvinism, his intense realization of the Fatherhood of God, lifting him above the narrow limits of a sect, has rendered him a religious teacher for all time. There are numerous passages in "The Task," giving such forcible and genuine expression to some of

the deeper experiences of the spiritual life, that, rich as is our literature in religious poetry, they will not soon sink into oblivion. Sometimes, in the presence of nature, he is either overpowered by a sense of her marvellous beauty, or wrapt in quiet contemplation; while ever and anon he is lifted up into a state of ecstasy by a sense of the nearness of the Divine Spirit, as he reveals himself to the pure in heart, and of the glorious liberty and inward illumination which accompany such a revelation.

“Then we are free; then liberty, like day,
Breaks on the soul, and by a flash from Heaven,
Fires all the faculties with glorious joy.”

The recognition of human brotherhood, a necessary corollary from the Fatherhood of God, awakened in Cowper that enthusiasm of humanity, that respect for man as man, regardless of colour and of rank, which has continued ever since to be one of the prime factors in our modern civilization.

In the noble tribute paid by our poet to Captain Cook, he gives emphatic expression to his conviction that, in virtue of their common relation to the universal Father, all human beings, including

“Our freeborn brethren of the southern pole,”

are invested with equal and inviolable rights.

Many circumstances conspired at that particular juncture, to direct this newly awakened philanthropy against the gigantic evil of the African slave trade. By an iniquitous provision of the treaty of Utrecht, England had obtained the monopoly of the slave trade to the Spanish colonies. “This part of the treaty,” Mr. Lecky tells us, “gave unanimous satisfaction in England.” “A national policy made it its main object to encourage the kidnapping of tens of thousands of negroes, and their consignment to the most miserable slavery.” So completely was the national conscience seared, that this infamous traffic, the source of immense wealth, was

carried on without apparently the slightest suspicion, that it involved the violation of any law, human or divine.

Against this crying iniquity, Cowper hurls his passionate invectives, and doubtless contributed, in no small measure, to awaken that spirit of fiery indignation which resulted in its abolition.

“I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earned.
No ! dear as freedom is, and in my heart’s
Just estimation, prized above all price,
I had much rather be myself the slave,
And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.”

Another deplorable feature of the eighteenth century was its cruelty, as manifested not only in the terrible severity of its penal code, processions of criminals on their way to Tyburn being a familiar spectacle in the London streets, but also in the brutal amusements of the people ; bear-baiting, bull-baiting, cock-fighting, and other savage pastimes, attended with hideous suffering to the victims of these barbarous sports, being universally practised. Numerous passages might be selected from the poems of Cowper, bearing witness to the tender-heartedness with which he regarded our humble fellow-creatures, any cruelty practised against whom called forth his sternest reprobation. Thus he exclaims :

“I would not enter on my list of friends,
Though graced with polished manners and fine sense,
Yet wanting sensibility, the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.”

Cowper’s patriotism, like his philanthropy, was based upon his belief in the universal Fatherhood of God, a principle which, by bringing the nation into direct relation with the Most High, tended to invest it, in his sight, with something of a sacred character ; accordingly, cherishing

an ardent desire for the welfare of his countrymen, he followed with intense interest the state of public affairs both at home and abroad.

While, by the voice of its great religious teachers, the nation was being aroused from its spiritual torpor, the moral tone of public life continued to be deplorably low; in politics the grossest corruption prevailed; patriotism seemed extinct; the energies of the nation were paralyzed, and we are told by the historian that the years 1756 and 1757 were among the most humiliating in our national history. With reference to this period Lord Chesterfield says: "We are no longer a nation." "I never yet saw so dreadful a prospect." But, in accordance with the old adage, "When Bale is highest, Bote is nighest," in the hour of England's supreme need a statesman appeared who, while sharing Lord Chesterfield's desponding views as to the apparently hopeless condition of the Empire, could exclaim, with just self-confidence, "I am sure that I can save the country and no one else can." That statesman was William Pitt, one of the most noteworthy figures in English history, who, in taking the direction of public affairs, succeeded in breathing into the nation something of his own lofty enthusiasm, and under his influence its courage and patriotism revived. After a series of desperate struggles England's triumph was complete, and the nation passed from a state of depressing anxiety to one of boundless enthusiasm. It is not surprising that Cowper's heart should be drawn to "the great Commoner," who, while honest and incorruptible in public life, was pure in his domestic relations, and who loved England with an intense and almost passionate love. Numerous passages might be quoted from his poems, bearing witness to the sentiments of genuine admiration with which the great statesman was regarded by the poet.

We learn from Cowper's letters that he shared the intense interest awakened by the writings of Rousseau, whose glowing "enthusiasm of humanity," while opening a new epoch in the history of human progress,

coloured the literature alike of England and of the Continent.

The gospel of social equality, proclaimed with all the depth and fervour of conviction by the French enthusiast, harmonizing with the principle of human brotherhood, so passionately realized by the English poet, while quickening his sympathy with the unspeakable wretchedness of the lower classes in France, intensified, at the same time, his abhorrence of the tyranny and oppression of which they were the victims, and for which such terrible retribution was at hand.

From the vehemence with which he inveighs against every form of oppression, as high treason against the universal Father, together with his prophetic aspirations after a more humane state of things, embracing the brotherhood, not only of individuals but of nations, Cowper occupies a unique position, as the herald of the coming revolution ; a character in which he appears in the following apostrophe to the Bastille : ¹

“ Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts,
Ye dungeons and ye caverns of despair,
That monarchs have supplied from age to age
With music such as suits their sovereign ears,
The sighs and groans of miserable men !
There 's not an English heart that would not leap
To hear that ye had fallen at last ! ”

Rebelling, like Rousseau, against the unjust inequalities, the selfish exclusiveness, and other anomalies of the prevailing social systems, and regarding liberty as man's inalienable right, he devotes to her praise some of his noblest utterances :

“ 'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume,
And we are weeds without it.”

From personal, social, and political liberty, the poet rises to a higher sphere and proclaims that true emancipation is that of the mind, and results from the recep-

¹ See “Theology in the English Poets.” Rev. A. Stopford Brooke.

tion and assimilation by the human soul of heavenly truth :

“He is the freeman whom the Truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside.”

Cowper's originality appears, not only as the champion of liberty, and as the poet of humanity under its wider aspects, but also as the lover and faithful delineator of Nature.

Apparently without an effort, he completed the emancipation of poetry from the conventionalisms by which she had so long been shackled ; feeling intense delight in the presence of Nature, and gifted with keen sensibility and practised observation, he painted with loving fidelity the landscape which lay outstretched before him, introducing into his picture, with admirable but unconscious art, the rustic figures as they presented themselves ; the woodman and his dog ; the waggoner and the loaded wain ; the cattle waiting their wonted fodder ; together with the cawing rooks and kites that

“Swim sublime
In still repeated circles screaming loud.”

As the poet of the fireside, and of the domestic affections, still more than as the painter of Nature, Cowper was at once taken to the heart of England ; in the wide range of our national literature there are few poems more truly pathetic than his “Address to his mother's picture,” which, appealing to the tenderest sentiments of the human heart, will never become obsolete. In his poetry of the Home, with its simple pleasures and heartfelt delights, as well as in the wider sphere of politics, the English poet may, in part, have drawn his inspiration from Rousseau, whose charming delineations of the family, freed from the conventionalisms which had gathered around it, effected in the domestic life of France a revolution second only in importance to that which was ere long to shatter to its base her social and political system.

It is not surprising that, in the reaction from the

corrupt and artificial society depicted in Pope's "Rape of the Lock," Cowper should have been hailed by his own generation as the "poet of the domestic circle, and the apostle of the home."

As the impassioned enemy of tyranny under all its forms; as the devoted champion of human rights, based upon the great principle of universal brotherhood; as the faithful and loving delineator of Nature, and as the advocate of simple pleasures and home-bred delights, Cowper may justly be regarded as heralding the glorious company of nineteenth century poets.

ROBERT BURNS.

1759—1796.

Two years after the publication of "The Task," appeared the first poems of Burns, "whose thought was spontaneous as the song of birds."

It is pleasant to find the contemporary poets of England and Scotland mutually appreciative; in a letter to his friend, Mr. Rose, Cowper expressed genuine admiration for the poems of Burns; and in writing to Mr. Dunlop, Burns exclaims, "Is not 'The Task' a glorious poem?" and proceeds as follows: "The religion of 'The Task,' bating a few scraps of Calvinistic divinity, is the religion of God and Nature, the religion that exalts and ennobles man."

The following passage from the after-dedication of Burns's poems is interesting as revealing the source of his spirit-stirring song: "The poetic genius of my country found me," he says, "as the prophetic bard, Elijah, did Elisha—at the plough, and threw her inspiring mantle over me. She bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures of my native tongue: I tuned my wild, artless notes as she inspired." Hence, as might be expected, his poetry, which gushed forth with the impetuosity of a Highland torrent, breathes the freshness of the mountain breeze, and his songs, like sparks of fire, scattered far and wide, quickened the new birth of poetry which marked the close of the eighteenth century.

Love of Nature, boundless and intense, was a striking characteristic of Burns, and finds expression in many a

beautiful poem, especially in "The Vision," where Coila, the Scottish Muse, her brow entwined with the leaf-clad holly bough, thus addresses him :

"I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
Delighted with the dashing roar;
Or when the North his fleecy store
Drove through the sky,
I saw grim nature's visage hoar
Struck thy young eye.

"Or when the deep green-mantled earth
Warm cherished every floweret's birth,
And joy and music pouring forth
In every grove,
I saw thee eye the general mirth
With boundless love."

✓ Tender and compassionate love towards our humbler fellow-creatures is another striking characteristic of the Ayrshire poet, a sentiment which leads him to recognize the tie of brotherhood between himself and the field-mouse on turning up her nest with the plough, and which has nowhere found more exquisite expression than in the poem entitled "A Winter Night," of which Carlyle says, "This is worth a whole volume of homilies on Mercy, for it is the voice of Mercy itself."

"I thought me on the ourie cattle,
Or silly sheep, wha bide this brattle
Of wintry war,
Or through the drift, deep-lairing sprattle
Beneath a scaur.

"Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
That in the merry months of spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Where wilt thou cower thy chattering wing
And close thy ee?"

✓ Ardent, however, as was the love which Burns cherished for Nature, and for all natural objects, they occupied only a subordinate place in his affections; with him humanity is paramount, and the great gospel which

✓ he proclaimed is the inherent dignity of man, irrespective of station and of wealth.

The great principle of human brotherhood, based upon the belief in God as the universal Father, had been already proclaimed by Cowper, who, in the wide range of his sympathy, had embraced all human beings, including the African negro and the islander of the South Sea.

Gray in his "Elegy," and Goldsmith in his "Deserted Village," had somewhat idealized the homely joys and sorrows of our rural population, while Crabbe, in his powerful poems, "The Village," "The Parish Register," and "The Borough," had drawn a faithful and harrowing picture of the actual condition of the lower classes, their abject poverty, their ghastly sufferings, and their hopeless toil.

It was Burns, himself a son of toil, who, through the medium of his verse, brought home to the hearts of his contemporaries the great truth that all the capacities and powers inherent in human nature are the heritage alike of high and low, of rich and poor, and that our primary passions and affections, our common sufferings and our common joys, irrespective of external circumstances, constitute the poet's highest theme. As recognizing the great principle of equality, Burns may justly be regarded as one of the earliest poets of Democracy.

✓ At the same time, being endowed with a passionate love of the beautiful, a keen sense of humour, and deep sympathy with everything human, he threw around his delineations of Scottish peasant life a charm which tended not only to reconcile the poor to their lot, but also to make them feel that it affords ample scope for the exercise of all the virtues which dignify human nature. Such a picture we have in "The Cottar's Saturday Night," which gives expression to the strong home affections and deep religious earnestness which lie at the root of the national character.

"The epistle to Davie, a brother poet," is one of the earliest, as it is one of the most characteristic, of the

poet's utterances. Of this poem his brother writes as follows: "It was, I think, in the summer of 1784 when, in the interval of harder labour, Robert and I were weeding in the garden, that he repeated to me the principal part of this epistle; I believe the first idea of Robert's becoming an author was started on this occasion."

As having initiated the poetical career of Burns, I am tempted to quote the first verse of this well-known poem.

"It's no in titles nor in rank,
It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
 To purchase peace and rest;
It's no in makin' muckle mair,
It's no in books, it's no in lear,
 To make us truly blest:
If happiness hae not her seat,
 And centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
 But never can be blest.
Nae treasures nor pleasures
 Could make us happy lang;
The heart aye's the part aye
 That makes us right or wrang."

After an interval of ten years, on the first day of 1795, Burns composed his well-known ode, "A man's a man for a' that." In the meantime there had been enacted the great drama of the French Revolution, which proclaimed the advent of a new era, wherein Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were to be the watchwords.

Burns, like all the ardent spirits of the age, felt the keenest sympathy with a movement which was in harmony with the deepest sentiments of his nature, and this powerful poem, charged as it were with electric fire, gave utterance to thoughts which were stirring the hearts of millions.

"Is there for honest poverty
That hangs his head, and a' that?
The coward slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!

For a' that, and a' that,
Our toil's obscure and a' that;
The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man 's the gow'd for a' that."

The idea embodied in the concluding line of this verse, as to the inherent dignity of human nature, involving the recognition that its diviner elements, its heroism, its compassion, its self-sacrificing love, and other high virtues, know nothing of class distinctions, entitles Burns to rank as the poetical exponent of the Revolution, an upheaval which inaugurated a new epoch, alike in the history and the literature of Europe.

His grand war-ode, composed in 1793, Bruce's address to his army at Bannockburn, "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," owes its inspiration, partly at least, as he himself tells us, to his sympathy with the French Republicans. "There is a tradition which I have met with in many places in Scotland," he writes, "that the old air, 'Hey, tullie, tullie,' was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn. This thought in my yesternight's evening walk, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence, which I threw into a kind of Scottish ode, fitted to the air, that one might suppose to be the gallant royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning." He adds that "The accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some struggles of the same nature, *not quite so ancient*, roused my rhyming mania."

How deeply he sympathized with the Revolutionary movement may be inferred from the following incident: "A suspicious-looking brig appeared in the Solway; Burns and his fellow officers boarded and took her; he bought the guns and sent them, with a letter, to the French legislative assembly, requesting them to accept the present as a mark of his admiration and sympathy."

It is in his songs that the varied elements of his genius—his glowing imagination, his impetuosity of passion, his tender sensibility, his pathos, his buoyant

humour, his patriotic fervour and his exuberant mirth have found the fullest expression, and embodying as they do the primary affections and emotions of the human heart, they have carried his fame far and wide, and wherever the English tongue is spoken they have made the name of Burns a household word. I cannot perhaps more suitably conclude this brief notice of Burns than by quoting the following passage from an Essay by Principal Shairp. "Burns," he says, "was emphatically the purifier of Scottish song. We who inherit Scottish song as he left it can hardly imagine how much he did to purify and elevate our national melodies. A genuine poet, who well knew what he spoke of, the late Thomas Aird, has said, "Those old Scottish melodies, sweet and strong though they were, strong and sweet, were, all the more for their very strength and sweetness, a moral plague from the indecent words to which many of them had long been set. How was the plague to be stayed? All the preachers in the land could not divorce the grossness from the music. The only way was to put something better in its stead; this inestimable something better Burns gave us."

Unfortunately there are elements in the character and in the poems of Burns which are deeply to be deplored; upon these, however, I am not called upon to dwell. Considered in relation to human progress, many of his poems give forcible expression to that newly awakened enthusiasm of humanity which formed so striking a feature of the age, a service which, had he no other claim upon our gratitude, would entitle the Ayrshire ploughman to rank among the benefactors of mankind.

The eighteenth century, born into an utterly prosaic world, may truly be said "to have made a swanlike end, dying in music," and the poems of Burns, throbbing with revolutionary life, may be regarded as the preliminary notes of the grand chorus which was to usher in the nineteenth century, and entitle their author to rank as its Corypheus.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

1770—1850.

↓ ALL admirers of Wordsworth's genius cannot but regret the prosaic element which, pervading many of his poems, seriously mars their beauty and diminishes their value.

↙ The works of no other poet exhibit such striking inequalities; while his higher utterances, which insure him a place among the immortals, are vitalized by the breath of genuine poetic inspiration, others fall to the level of ordinary prose, and are the more disappointing from their intimate association with passages of true poetic beauty. This serious defect may perhaps, in some measure, be traced to the rôle which he assumed of a poetic reformer, who, rebelling against the artificiality of the classical school, was, by his glorification of simplicity, betrayed into occasional triviality alike of subject and of expression.

Literary criticism, however, being alien to my purpose, I shall content myself with indicating what appear to me to be the distinguishing qualities of this truly great poet, together with the new elements contributed by him to our national culture.

When Burns published his first volume of poems, Wordsworth was a youth, sixteen years of age, preparing to enter the University. Reared among beautiful scenery and holding with Nature daily and hourly converse, her varied features had been wrought into the very texture of his being; living, moreover, among the homely men and women who dwell amid the hills and dales of Cumberland, he became acquainted with human nature,

unmarred by any conventional bias. He was thus peculiarly qualified to appreciate the poetry of Burns, whom he dearly loved, and whom he subsequently characterized

“As him who walked in glory and in joy,
Following his plough along the mountain side.”

In the beautiful lines entitled “At the grave of Burns,” written during his Scotch tour in 1803, he acknowledges the deep debt which he owed to the earlier poet :

“Well might I mourn when he was gone,
Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
When breaking forth as Nature’s own,
He showed my youth,
How verse may build a princely throne
On humble truth.”

How deeply he shared with Burns his passionate love of Nature, together with his reverence for man as man, irrespective of external circumstances, appeared when, two years after the death of the Ayrshire bard, in 1798, his own lyrical ballads saw the light.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the affinity between the Scotch and English poet, the diversity of their genius was still more remarkable than their points of agreement. Deficient in the spontaneity, the broad humour and exuberant mirth which form such striking characteristics of Burns, Wordsworth, soaring to heights of speculation inaccessible to the Ayrshire ploughman, revealed regions of poetic thought and emotion to which the latter was necessarily a stranger.

To Wordsworth Nature, as the exponent of the Invisible, was an object, not only of passionate love, but also of the deepest reverence; and his recognition of the wonderful interaction which is constantly going on between the human soul and the mysterious life inherent in external things finds expression in several of his most beautiful poems :

“While still his voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual mind to the external world
Is fitted; . . . how exquisitely too
The external world is fitted to the mind.”

This grand conception of Nature, as the Revealer of God and the Educator of humanity, and of man as responding to her appeal in virtue of the preestablished harmony between them, is one of the underlying thoughts embodied in “The Prelude,” wherein, while following step by step “The Growth of a Poet’s mind,” from boyhood to maturity, we trace with peculiar interest the gradual development of the religious element which forms so striking a characteristic of his genius.

From the first vague feeling of awe, awakened by the sublime aspects of Nature, and of joy and peace, inspired by her calmer beauty, he rose to the conception of a soul in this vast universe, which he recognized as God.

Every subsequent experience of the glory, the majesty, the splendour, of the material creation, strengthened this impression of a Living Presence in Nature, to whose service he felt himself especially consecrated. It was, however, among the stupendous glories of the Alps that, overpowered by the magnificence of Nature, he recognized that her varied features,

“Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
Were all like workings of one mind;

.
Characters of the great apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity
Of first and last and ’midst and without end.”

(“Prelude,” book vi.)

There also, in that sublime sanctuary of Nature, was revealed to him the grandeur of the human soul.

“I was lost,” he exclaims,
“But to my conscious soul I now can say,
‘I recognize thy glory:’

‘Whether we be young or old,
Our destiny, our being’s heart and home
Is with infinitude and only there;’

With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be."
("Prelude," book vi.)

In passing into Italy he came under the influence of her softer beauty, endowed with power,

"As sweet as love,
Or mildest visitation of pure thought,
When God, the giver of all joy, is thanked
Religiously, in silent blessedness."

Such experiences may be regarded as consummating one phase of Wordsworth's consecration for his lofty task, as the religious teacher of the age.

No English poet of this century has, perhaps, exercised a profounder influence over the minds of his contemporaries than Wordsworth, and were those, who have come under the spell of his genius, questioned as to the source of the power exercised over them by his poetry, many would, I believe, agree in referring it, in large measure, to the spiritual passion which he brought to the contemplation of Nature; endowed with true poetic instinct, steeped in wonder and in mystery, he gazed with sympathy so intense, upon her varied aspects, that he was enabled, as no previous poet, to interpret the mystic characters inscribed on earth and sky, on every tree and every flower.

Hence, many who had simply admired Nature for her exquisite loveliness, were, through his agency, led to regard her under her more spiritual aspects, and by them the poet was revered as the inspired seer, who had opened their eyes to contemplate the material universe as the voice and symbol of the Infinite.

Others again there were to whom, before their acquaintance with Wordsworth, Nature had already been infinitely precious, as imparting "Audible tidings of invisible things," and who on becoming acquainted with his poems, were enraptured to find their most sacred intuitions, which had appeared to them too subtle for

expression, embodied in musical and graceful verse, and the poet who had accomplished this literary miracle, was taken to their hearts, as a brother and a friend.

Among the numerous passages which might be quoted in illustration of this remark, I will content myself with the two following: one from the "Excursion," and one from the lines on revisiting the Wye.

"In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not: in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made it; it was blessedness and love."
(*"Excursion,"* book i.)

"Nor less I trust
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight,
Of all this unintelligible world,
I lighten'd:—that serene and blessed mood
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
And even the motion of our human blood,
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet with the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things."
(*Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey.*)

This spiritualization of Nature, under her humbler, as well as her more majestic forms, as the ever-living manifestation of the Deity, may be regarded as Wordsworth's special contribution to the religious life of the age.

The love of Nature which, in his youth, had been his ruling passion, was the prelude to that enthusiasm of humanity, which subsequently became his dominant and inspiring sentiment. The foundation of this human love had been unconsciously laid in childhood, when his

affections had been called forth by the homely but honest and noble-minded peasantry among whom his lot was cast. It was, however, during his residence in France, where he came in contact with the revolutionary ideas which were then thrilling the hearts of millions, and where, as it has been finely said, "he first felt the authentic beat of a nation's heart," that his love of humanity became an absorbing passion, which has left its impress upon his poetry.

The great principle of human brotherhood, which had been proclaimed with religious fervour by Cowper, and which involved the right of every human being to freedom, and other blessings inherent in our common humanity seemed about to be realized; the artificial barriers which, from time immemorial, had severed the different classes of society from each other, seemed suddenly levelled, and the golden prospect of human happiness and progress thus revealed to their enraptured gaze, filled men's hearts with exultation and with boundless hope. How intensely Wordsworth shared the elation of the period may be inferred from his passionate exclamation:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!

.

O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!

.

Not favoured spots alone, but the whole Earth,
The beauty wore of promise."

("Prelude," book xi.)

He became, as he tells us, a patriot, adding:

"And my heart was all
Given to the people and my love was theirs."

His republican fervour and his faith in the beneficent results of the Revolution survived the Reign of Terror, with its attendant horrors. Deep, however, was the

despondency which took possession of his soul when Revolutionary France, the champion of Freedom, entering upon her career of conquest, violated the rights of other nations, more especially of Switzerland, the chosen home of Liberty.

Terrible was the mental crisis through which he passed, occasioned by the rude extinction of his fondly cherished dream, and which led him, losing faith in the principles of the Revolution, to join the party of reaction.

In "The Prelude" we learn by what agencies the cloud, which had cast so dark a shadow over his life, was gradually dispersed.

"Then it was,
Thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good!—
That the beloved sister in whose sight
Those days were passed, . . .
Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self."

Then it was also that,

"Nature's self,
By all varieties of human love
Assisted, led me back through opening day
To those sweet counsels between head and heart
Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace,
Which, through the later sinkings of this cause,
Hath still upheld me, and upholds me now."
(*"Prelude,"* book xi.)

We learn also from the same source, how, on emerging once more into the light of day, the poet found that, while his love of Nature was as fervent as ever, his enthusiasm of humanity had survived the fiery ordeal through which he had passed :

"Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
Once more in man an object of delight,
Of pure imagination and of love."
(*"Prelude,"* book xiii.)

In his mind, Nature and Humanity were alike sacred, as having their common source in God. Nevertheless, man,

as the higher manifestation of the deity, was regarded by him as invested with supreme significance. Accordingly, poetry being his life-work, he selected as his principal theme the dignity of man as man, and recognizing that, among poor and homely men and women, the primal instincts, affections and passions of the human heart have freer play, unchecked by the conventionalisms of more polished society, he made their humble lines, for the most part, the burden of his song.

With the exception of Burns, he was the first to invest with poetic charm the joys and sorrows, the trials and the struggles of the lowly born, and to recognize with the Ayrshire poet that the virtues which give dignity to human nature, and inspire faith in the grandeur of its destiny, are the common heritage of the race.

While many of Wordsworth's votaries have, as before observed, traced the secret of his influence to his spiritual interpretation of Nature, others refer it to his profound sympathy with universal humanity.

Thus Lord Selborne, after affirming that his acquaintance with the poetry of Wordsworth had been to him as great a power in the education of mind and character, after the Bible, as any that he had known, proceeds to attribute this influence to the sympathy and intelligence with which man is therein regarded and portrayed, which, he thinks, is something unique in literature.

"Men everywhere, men in all conditions,—Wordsworth felt with them and understood their conditions. He saw that which was great, that which was divine, that which was beautiful, pervading them all, in every condition; and he could make the lesson of the old Cumberland beggar as touching to the heart as the lesson of Laodamia or of Dion, or of any other great example of public or of private virtue." "That," adds Lord Selborne, "was, I think, a great thing to learn."

The striking gallery of portraits bequeathed by the poet to the world, wherein he has portrayed with loving fidelity the characters and lives of his poorer brethren, the shepherds and dalesmen of Cumberland, bear witness

to the zeal with which he has accomplished what he regarded as his heaven-appointed task. The recognition of the homely joys and sorrows of the poor, as opening a new and ample field for the poetry of Humanity, may be regarded as another contribution of Wordsworth to the culture of the age. With what valuable results the field thus opened by him has been cultivated by his successors, both in prose and verse, is attested by the literature of the nineteenth century.

The admirable blending of the picturesque and the human element forms a striking feature of Wordsworth's poetic portraiture. His rustic figures being often in such perfect harmony with the natural objects by which they are surrounded that, to borrow his own words :

"In truth together ye do seem,
Like something fashioned in a dream."

As illustrating this remark, I may instance "The Lines to a Highland Girl," which have furnished the above quotation; also "The Solitary Reaper," "The Leech Gatherer," and many other poetic gems, which are peculiarly characteristic of his genius.

The revolt against the limitation and the artificiality characterizing the poetry of the so-called Classical age of Dryden and Pope, which, inaugurated by Thomson, had been carried on by Cowper and Burns, thus achieved its final triumph in Wordsworth: with a spirit essentially truthful, and gifted with an eye "to see into the life of things," he paints directly from life, and hence his descriptions of Nature and his delineations of character exhibit that freshness and originality which constitute their peculiar charm.

Very noteworthy is the series of "Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty," which, composed during the interval between 1802 and 1816, bear witness to the deep interest with which, from his mountain solitude, the poet followed the course of public events both at home and abroad. These sonnets, some of which are among the finest in the English language, attest also

Wordsworth's unfailing sympathy with those true patriots, in whatever clime, who were fighting the battle of freedom.

They are, however, still more precious as giving expression to his own lofty patriotism; cherishing the most fervent love for England, he was keenly alive to her short-comings, and gave vent to his feelings in solemn words of warning and rebuke; among his sonnets one of the most memorable is that beginning with the following lines :

"Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour,
England hath need of thee."

Subsequently, however, his high-souled confidence in his dear native land returned, and, referring to his previous apprehensions, he exclaims :

"But when I think of thee and what thou art,
Verily in the bottom of my heart
Of those unfilial fears I am ashamed.
But dearly must we prize thee; we who find
In thee a bulwark for the cause of men."

Very noteworthy also are the following lines from another noble sonnet :

"In our halls is hung
Armoury of the invincible knights of old;
We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold
Which Milton held; in everything we are sprung
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold."

One of Wordsworth's noblest poems is his "Ode to Duty," which enforces the great truth that man's true liberty is found in his willing subjection to the moral law. That law being written in the human heart, may, by some happily constituted natures be obeyed without effort, and without a conscious recognition of its divine authority.

"Glad hearts without reproach or blot,
Who do thy work and know it not."

Such natures are, however, exceptional. In order to secure the permanent allegiance of mankind, duty must be recognized as the mandate of an infinite and eternal Being, whose commands are issued in love, and obedience to which is the necessary condition of human blessedness.

With this recognition of the moral law as inherent in the divine nature, and coextensive with the agency of God, the path of duty is irradiated by a light from heaven.

As the fragrance of the flower and the glory of the stars bear witness to the divine government in the material universe, so Duty is glorified when regarded as universal and everlasting law.

“Stern Law-giver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead’s most benignant grace,
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face.
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient Heavens, through Thee, are fresh
and strong.”

To this poem, more perhaps than to any other of the poet’s works, may be applied the words of Coleridge :

“An Orphic song indeed,
A song divine, of high and passionate thoughts,
To their own music chanted !”

The ode entitled, “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,” is, I believe, almost universally regarded as the highest effort of Wordsworth’s genius. Founded upon Plato’s doctrine of Reminiscence, in accordance with which the human soul is preëxistent, and, when born into this lower sphere, is haunted by recollections of the glory and splendour of its ante-natal home, it is to these recollections that Wordsworth traces the child’s intense delight in the beauty of Nature, together with the sense of wonder and of awe awakened by her sublimer aspects.

This idea, founded, as he himself tells us, upon his own experience of "the dreamlike vividness and splendour which invest objects of sight in childhood," finds expression in other poems beside his celebrated Ode.

I cannot, however, but agree with Mr. Matthew Arnold, in thinking that Wordsworth's experience in this respect was exceptional; and that the visionary splendour which to his wrapt gaze seemed to heighten the charm of natural beauty, must be regarded, not as the common heritage of childhood, but as the special privilege of genius, indicating in the child the poet-seer of the future.

Hence this magnificent Ode, which, as the poetic embodiment of Plato's graceful myth, is exquisitely beautiful, and to which, as founded upon the poet's personal experience, and as giving expression to some of our profoundest spiritual intuitions, the deepest interest attaches, cannot nevertheless be regarded as resting, like "The Ode to Duty," on the solid basis of eternal truth. This remark is not, however, applicable to the concluding stanzas of the poem, which tell that, if we have been true to the Heavenly vision, age will not be without its divine visitations, and will be not less but more impressed by the marvellous beauty of Nature, from its association with the joys and sorrows of humanity.

"And O, ye fountains, meadows, hills and groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!

Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;

I only have relinquished one delight

To live beneath your more habitual sway.

I love the brooks which down their channels fret,

Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;

The innocent brightness of a new-born day

Is lovely yet;

The clouds that gather round the setting sun

Do take a sober colouring from an eye

That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

Another race hath been, and other palms are won.

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,

Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,

To me the meanest flower that blows can give

Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

I cannot perhaps more fitly close this inadequate notice of Wordsworth's poetry than by quoting the following lines from the beautiful poem addressed to him by Coleridge, after listening to "The Prelude," and the justice of which, when we consider the wide range, the high moral tone, and the imaginative beauty of his works will, I imagine, be universally recognized.

"O great bard,
Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,
With steadfast eye I viewed thee in the choir
Of ever-enduring men. The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible space
Shed influence! They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it."

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

1772—1834.

WORDSWORTH'S tribute to Coleridge, in the Sixth Book of the "Prelude," while recording one of the most beautiful literary friendships in the annals of biography, recalling that which united the two great German poets, Goethe and Schiller, bears witness also to the remarkable combination of qualities and attainments,

"Thy learning, gorgeous eloquence,
And all the strength and plumage of thy youth,
Thy subtle speculations, toils abstruse
Among the schoolmen, and Platonic forms
Of wild ideal pageantry,"

which justified Wordsworth's assertion, that Coleridge was "the only wonderful man he had ever known."

Very striking, also, is the tribute paid to Coleridge by Julius Hare, by whom he is described as "the great religious philosopher, to whom the mind of our generation in England owes more than to any other man." To these tributes to the Poet's genius and widespread influence, many others, from the first thinkers of the age, might be added. Wide indeed is the field over which his speculative faculty ranged. Touching at almost every point the intellectual life of the period, he was, at the same time, metaphysician, moralist, critic, politician, theologian and poet.

His poetry, however, though of surpassing excellence, represents a very small portion of his mental activity, and would be inadequate to account for the remarkable

influence which he exercised over his contemporaries. Hence a few words as to his work in other directions, may form a not unfitting prelude to a brief notice of his poems.

As Wordsworth had completed the liberation of poetry from the shackles imposed upon her by the so-called classical school, which for nearly a century had tended to impede the higher flights of the imagination, so Coleridge may be regarded as having exercised a powerful influence in emancipating the human mind from the materialistic philosophy which, during the latter half of the eighteenth century, had held in England almost undisputed sway. He was one of the first to rebel against the theory which regards the human mind as the passive recipient of external impressions, and experience as the only source of knowledge; under the guidance of Kant, he was led to recognize the existence in man of faculties and intuitions, bringing him into immediate contact with those moral and spiritual truths which form the very groundwork of his being.

He was influential, moreover, in freeing the minds of his contemporaries, not only from the sensational philosophy of Locke, but also from the utilitarian morality of Paley. Regarding Conscience as God's vicegerent in the human soul, and as such claiming unqualified allegiance, he rejected Paley's doctrine of consequences, as the criterion of right and wrong, and protesting against the substitution of enlightened self-love for moral virtue, he strove to place morality upon a surer and firmer basis. To his resolute advocacy of these so-called transcendental ideas may, I believe, be ascribed the reverence in which he was held by such men as Dr. Newman, Dr. Arnold, the Rev. F. D. Maurice, and others. Noteworthy as a metaphysician and as a moralist, Coleridge was also distinguished as a critic, accomplishing in this department for England, the work of Lessing in Germany.

Recognizing that the creative processes of genius are as truly under the reign of law as the humbler workings

of the human mind, he endeavoured to raise criticism above the capricious and fluctuating standard of individual taste, and to establish it upon fundamental principles.

Gifted with a many-sided genius, and possessed by an ardent desire to penetrate to the root of things, he opened in every direction new mines of thought, and was content to scatter the mental treasure thus acquired, through the medium of fragmentary essays and of brilliant talk. Not having, however, embodied his philosophical views in any systematic work, his reputation as a metaphysician, a moralist, and a critic, so great among his contemporaries, will doubtless be comparatively short-lived, while his poetry, though limited in quantity, has acquired for him a place among "the laureate fraternity of immortal bards."

Like Wordsworth, and all the active-minded young men of the period, he hailed with rapture the outbreak of the French Revolution as the dawn for a new and glorious future for the human race. Three political poems, the "Ode to the departing year," "France," and "Fears in Solitude," composed respectively in 1796, 1797, and 1798, give expression to the tumultuous feelings awakened by the whirl and excitement of that troubled time.

"The Ode on France," which is a truly noble poem, opens with a magnificent invocation to the clouds, the ocean-waves, the woods, the rising sun, the blue rejoicing sky,—

"Yea, everything that is and will be free!
Bear witness for me, wheresoe'er ye be,
With what deep worship I have still adored,
The spirit of divinest liberty."

He gives forcible expression to his joyous exultation at the outbreak of the Revolution, together with his indignation against England when, "in an evil hour, she joined the Monarchs banded against France." Like Wordsworth, he was disenchanted when Revolutionary France, the Apostle of Freedom, invaded Switzerland;

“A patriot race to disinherit,
Of all that made their stormy wilds so dear.”

And in conclusion he enforces the great truth that :

“The sensual and the base rebel in vain,
Slaves by their own compulsion.”

The Ode entitled “Fears in Solitude,” wherein he denounces, in no measured terms, the crimes and shortcomings of England, telling, as he says :

“Most bitter truth, but without bitterness,”

though, as a poem, far inferior to the “Ode on France,” is in some measure redeemed by the great beauty of the opening and concluding stanzas, together with the noble burst of patriotic feeling, in which he expresses his intense love for his dear native land, notwithstanding the grievous errors which have called forth his indignant reproof.

“But, O dear Britain ! O my Mother Isle !
Needs must thou prove a name most dear and holy
To me, a son, a brother, and a friend,
A husband, and a father ! who revere
All bonds of natural love, and find them all
Within the limits of thy rocky shores.
O native Britain ! O my Mother Isle !
How shouldst thou prove aught else but dear and holy,
To me, who from thy lakes and mountain hills,
Thy clouds, thy quiet dales, thy rocks and seas,
Have drunk in all my intellectual life,
All sweet sensations, all ennobling thoughts,
All adoration of the God in Nature,
All lovely and all honourable things,
Whatever makes this mortal spirit feel
The joy and gladness of its future being ?
There lives nor form nor feeling in my soul,
Unborrowed from my country. O divine
And beauteous island ! thou hast been my sole
And most magnificent temple, in the which
I walk with awe, and sing my stately songs,
Loving the God that made me !”

In his "Ode on Dejection," after painting an exquisite picture of the western sky,

"And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars,
Yon crescent moon as fixed as if it grew,
In its own cloudless, starless, lake of blue ;"

he gives utterance to the pathetic confession :

"I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel how beautiful ye are."

In this poem he propounds a theory respecting the relation subsisting between Nature and the human mind, directly opposed to the teaching of Wordsworth, who, with his passionate love of Nature, regards her as exerting, through her manifold agencies, an almost creative power over the human being, as illustrated in his exquisite poem :

"Three years she grew in sun and shower !"

Coleridge, on the contrary, in this Ode and in other poems, represents external Nature as having no actual existence, but as being, so to speak, the product of the human mind.

"O Lady, we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does nature live ;

.

Ah ! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud,
Enveloping the Earth,
And from the soul itself must there be sent,
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element !"

That the passive attitude thus attributed to Nature sprang not from any definite theory, but was rather the reflection of a transient mood of the poet's mind, may perhaps be inferred from other passages in his poems,

wherein Nature is represented as exercising over man a healing and a beneficent influence, as, for example, in the beautiful lines in the tragedy of "Remorse," spoken by Alvar in his dungeon :

"With other ministrations thou, O Nature,
Healest thy wandering and distempered child :
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets :
Thy melodies of woods, and winds and waters !
Till he relent, and can no more endure
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy,
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,
His angry spirit healed and harmonized
By the benignant touch of love and beauty." (Act v. sc. 1.)

Thus also in the glorious "Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamony," which may form a pendant to Milton's magnificent morning hymn, Nature is represented as endowed with independent life, and is invited by the poet, under her grandest forms, with all "the signs and wonders of the elements," to

"Utter forth God and fill the hills with Praise."

Very noble is the concluding invocation to Mont Blanc.

"Thou kingly Spirit throned among the hills,
Thou dread Ambassador from Earth to Heaven,
Great Hierarch ! tell thou the silent sky,
And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun,
Earth with her thousand voices, praises God."

Among his poems in blank verse, the one entitled "The Lime-tree bower my prison," is especially noteworthy for its exquisite landscape touches, and as enforcing the truth conveyed in the following beautiful lines :

"Henceforth I shall know,
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure,
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,

No waste so vacant, but may well employ,
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart,
Awake to love and beauty."

Very felicitous also was his imaginative use of the grander phenomena of Nature, as illustrating the passions and sentiments of the human heart.

"The Lines addressed to Wordsworth, composed on the night after his recitation of 'The Prelude,'" are deeply touching, revealing, as they do, the profound humility with which he contrasted what appeared to him his own wasted life with the noble performance of his friend, whom, with his mental eye, he beholds already in the "Choir of ever-enduring men."

While penning these desponding lines, and also his pathetic verses entitled "Work without Hope," he might have been consoled, could he have foreseen that he also would take rank among the Immortals, an honour to which he is entitled, not only as the author of "The Ancient Mariner," and of "Christabel," which, by universal consent, are recognized as the most noteworthy creations of his genius, but also as one of England's greatest lyrical poets. Very beautiful is his touching poem entitled "Love," while no words can do justice to the exquisite melody of "Kubla Khan," the subtle music of which reminds us of Shelley.

Numerous passages might be quoted from "The Ancient Mariner," illustrating Coleridge's intense appreciation of external Nature together with that minute observance of her phenomena, which forms so striking a characteristic of his genius. The love of the lower animals, which he shared with Cowper, Burns, and Wordsworth, finds also emphatic expression in his great master-work, the moral of which is embodied in the familiar couplet :

"He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

The weird supernaturalism which characterizes "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," akin to the dreamy, morbid temperament of the poet, like his transcendental philosophy, had its source in Germany, and, harmonizing with the love of the marvellous and the mysterious inherent in the English character, has left its impress upon our national literature.

In conclusion, I will call attention to the remarkable influence exercised by Coleridge upon the genius of his contemporaries. "'Christabel,'" we are informed, "was circulated in manuscript many years before it was published; and, recited among the poets, it made an impression that proved an agency of poetic inspiration to them."

Thus, it is mentioned by Mr. Lockhart, that "the casual recitation of 'Christabel,' in Scott's presence so fixed the music of that noble fragment in his memory, that it prompted the production of 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel.'"

The influence exerted over them by "Christabel," is also recognized, and fully acknowledged, by Lord Byron and by Shelley. "It was a great lesson to the poets, in that it disclosed an unknown, or at least forgotten, freedom and power in English versification—a music the echoes of which are to be heard in the poems of Scott and Byron."

LORD BYRON.

1788—1844.

It is not surprising that the present generation, "upon whose ears," to quote the words of Mr. Swinburne, "first, after the cadences of elder poets, fell the faultless and fervent melodies of Tennyson," should not appreciate the poetry of Byron, with its faulty versification and its other grievous and manifold defects. They will probably find it difficult to understand the boundless enthusiasm with which his vigorous and brilliant verse was hailed by his contemporaries; nevertheless, though this period of extravagant and indiscriminate admiration has passed away, to him, in conjunction with Wordsworth, has been assigned, by so competent a critic as Mr. Matthew Arnold, the highest place among the master-singers of the nineteenth century.

Brilliant indeed was the galaxy of English poets, including Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, who, coming, as it were, under the spell of the French Revolution, gave expression to the vehement emotions awakened by that tremendous catastrophe, while the influence which it exerted over each was modified by his individual genius.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, as we have seen, while hailing with impassioned joy the outbreak of the Revolution as the advent of a new era for humanity, had failed to grasp with sufficient force its underlying principles, and, accordingly, when disenchanted by the hostile attitude assumed by France towards the liberty of Europe, they abandoned their fondly cherished dreams

of progress and universal brotherhood, and joined the party of reaction.

Very different was the phase of the revolutionary spirit which manifested itself in Lord Byron, who may perhaps be not inaptly characterized as the genius of revolt.

With the subjugation of revolutionary France, it was taken for granted by the great majority of educated Englishmen that the spirit of the Revolution was for ever quenched. Weary of the prolonged struggle which had so sorely taxed the national resources, disgusted with the revolutionary ideas which had culminated in the Reign of Terror, they hailed with heartfelt satisfaction their overthrow on the continent, and determined, should they dare to manifest themselves in England, upon their immediate and forcible repression.

Actuated by these feelings, they clung more tenaciously than ever to their time-honoured institutions, political, social, and religious, which, by the tremendous upheaval of the Revolution, had been so rudely shaken, and which they regarded as henceforth unassailable, and established upon a firmer basis than ever. After describing the mental bondage, conventionality, and cant which at that time characterized English society, Matthew Arnold proceeds as follows: "The falsehood, cynicism, insolence, misgovernment, oppression, with their consequent un-failing crop of human misery, which were produced by this state of things, roused Byron to irreconcilable revolt and battle." Byron's relation to the temper which at that time prevailed in England is described in language still more forcible by his biographer, Prof. Nicholls: "This scion of a long line of lawless bloods,—a Scandinavian Berserker, if there ever was one, the literary heir of the Eddas—was specially created to wage that war, to smite the conventionality, which is the tyrant of England, with the hammer of Thor, and to sear, with the sarcasm of Mephistopheles, the hollow hypocrisy, sham taste, sham morals, sham religion, of the society by which he was surrounded and infected,

and which all but succeeded in seducing him." Thus keenly alive to the oppression and misgovernment which everywhere prevailed, and taking a genuine pleasure in unmasking all false pretensions, he assumed an antagonistic attitude towards all constituted authorities, towards corrupt monarchies, corrupt societies, and corrupt hierarchies, and giving expression to his feelings in scathing satire, he kept alive the spirit of the Revolution after it had apparently been driven from the field. He was, moreover, in harmony with the feelings of profound dissatisfaction and of boundless discontent which prevailed throughout Europe when the legitimate aspirations for social and political freedom, kindled by the French Revolution, had been ruthlessly suppressed; and when the promises of constitutional government, given by monarchs to their subjects, remained unfulfilled. Wretched himself, "there was not a single note of human anguish of which he was not master," the impassioned utterances in which he sought to relieve his over-burthened heart, were hailed as giving voice to the spirit of the age, and having, during his residence abroad, assisted the Carbonari, and in other ways associated himself with the insurrectionary movement, he was hailed by all those who rebelled against the existing order of things as their recognized leader and champion. His passionate individuality thus impressed itself upon the mind of Europe, and no poet, perhaps, has ever exerted so sudden and so widespread an influence, not only over England, but also over the continent.

"Gervinus and Karl Elze have shown how the Slavonic youth of Poland and Russia, no less than the Teutonic and French races, received from him ineffaceable influence, and responded in their great political movements, as also in their literature. His discontent, his 'world-sorrow,' impressed them equally with his love of revolution and freedom. Italy, Spain, and Greece also responded in their spirit of progress and emancipation, even as Alp answers Jura during a thunderstorm."¹

¹ "Life of Lord Byron." Hon. Roden Noel.

Byron's genuine love of liberty, akin to his hatred of tyranny and his generous sympathy with the weak and the oppressed, qualities of which several striking illustrations are recorded in his boyhood, is attested by many noble utterances scattered through his poems. What, for example, can be finer than the following stanza from "The Isles of Greece," which recalls Wordsworth's splendid sonnet, commencing with the lines :

"Two voices are there ; one is of the Sea,
One of the Mountains ; each a mighty voice ;
In both, from age to age, thou didst rejoice,
They were thy chosen music, Liberty !"

Thus also Byron associates the mountains and the sea with the plain of Marathon, whereon Liberty achieved one of her grandest triumphs.

"The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea ;
And musing here an hour alone,
I dreamed that Greece might yet be free ;
For, standing on the Persians' grave,
I could not deem myself a slave."

That, amid the apparent success of reactionary principles, he never lost his belief in the ultimate triumph of liberty, is attested by the following lines :

"Yet, Freedom ! yet, thy banner torn, but flying,
Streams, like the thunderstorm, *against* the wind ;
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind.
The tree hath lost its blossoms, and the rind,
Chopped by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts—and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North,
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth."¹

Where again shall we find a more touching protest against tyranny and persecution than "The Prisoner of Chillon," with its noble introductory sonnet ?

¹ "Childe Harold," iv. xcvi.

“Eternal spirit of the chainless mind !
Brightest in dungeons, Liberty ! thou art ;
For there thy habitation is the heart—
The heart which love of thee alone can bind ;
And when thy sons to fetters are consign’d—
To fetters, and the damp vault’s dayless gloom,
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom’s fame finds wings on every wind.
Chillon ! thy prison is a holy place,
And thy sad floor an altar—for ’twas trod,
Until his very steps have left a trace
Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a sod,
By Bonnivard ! may none those marks efface,
For thy appeal from tyranny to God.”

Nor must it be forgotten that it was not only through the medium of imperishable verse that he waged implacable war against tyranny and wrong ; when the opportunity presented itself, when, crushed beneath the yoke of despotism, Greece rose against her oppressors, eager to defend the cause of freedom against Turkish oppression and misrule, he threw himself, heart and soul, into the struggle, and exchanging the pen for the sword, attested his sincerity in his championship of Greek nationality, by the sacrifice of his life.

It is painful to turn from this presentation of Byron, as the dauntless champion of Liberty, to contemplate his character under other and less favourable aspects. A large portion of his poetry bears, however, so strongly the impress of his powerful and complex individuality, that, in order to estimate his influence as a poet, it is necessary to consider briefly his character as a man. We are told by his biographer that in describing his brother poet, Burns, he has drawn a not unfaithful portrait of himself :—“What an antithetical mind !—tenderness, roughness ;—delicacy, coarseness ;—sentiment, sensuality ;—soaring and grovelling ;—dirt and deity ;—all mixed up in that one compound of inspired clay !”

It is this strangely antithetical nature which we find reflected in the poetry of Byron who, more perhaps than any other poet, with the exception of Shelley, indulged in self-portraiture. Bearing this in mind, we recognize

the truth of Sir Walter Scott's statement, "that in his various heroes, in Childe Harold, in Cain, in Manfred, as well as in the Corsair, in the Giour, in Lara and others, he continued to represent only one human figure as the centre of all, and that figure was drawn from life."

Now it has been maintained that, among these Byronic heroes, however fascinating to the popular imagination, "you search in vain for a single healthful impersonation of Humanity."

"On the pages of Byron," it has been said, "you can scarce escape from some form or other of morbid feeling, vicious egotism, pride, contempt, and misanthropy."

It is moreover maintained, that, "herein was the mischief that Byron's poetry did in its season of authority: reversing the poet's function which is to heal what is unhealthy, to strengthen what is weak, to chasten what is corrupt, and to lift up what is sinking down, he fostered what was false, ministered to what was morbid, and moreover tempted men on to the willing delusion that their weakness was strength."¹

Much more to the same effect might be quoted, together with many similar protests, notably that of Lord Macaulay, as to the injurious influence exercised by the poetry of Lord Byron; nor can it be denied, by the most ardent admirers of the poet's genius, that these severe strictures embody a large measure of truth.

Moreover this melancholy fact cannot excite surprise when it is remembered that poetry reflects not only the individuality of the poet, but also the salient features of the society by which he is surrounded, and that the era of the Regency, in which Byron's lot was cast, was distinguished alike for its profligacy, its infidelity, and its cynicism; as an habitué of that corrupt society, he did not rise above this environment, and hence the weaknesses and the vices which he shared with his associates, have left their taint upon certain portions of his work. Happily the evil is not all-pervading; were it otherwise, the immense influence exercised by the genius of Byron,

¹ "Introduction to English literature." Henry Reed.

not only over all English-speaking peoples, but also on the continent, would remain an inexplicable phenomenon. Men and women, high and low, cultured and uncultured, are not captivated merely by what appeals to their lower instincts, whatever the forms in which it may be embodied. The secret of Byron's power must be traced to other and deeper fountains. One source of this power has already been pointed out.

When the spirit of the Revolution had been apparently quelled, he appeared as the dauntless soldier, waging fiery battle not only against tyranny and wrong, but also against hypocrisy, conventionalism and cant, a battle which he waged till he fell—waged, as Matthew Arnold, quoting Mr. Swinburne, says, "with such splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength." Another source of this power must be sought in his profound and passionate love of Nature, especially under her stormier aspects, when she was most in harmony with his own restless and tempestuous spirit.

The applicability to himself of Byron's portrait of Burns, reveals a certain affinity between their nature and character; nevertheless no contrast can more striking than that presented by the two poets in their attitude towards the material universe. Deep as was Burns's love of Nature, his love of Humanity was deeper still; and accordingly all her varied manifestations, from the humblest to the most sublime, became invested to him with an additional charm when associated with the fortunes, joyous or grievous, of human beings, with whom he felt united by the strong bond of universal brotherhood.

Byron's nature-worship was of a very different order; looking down upon his fellow-mortals, with few exceptions, with supreme contempt, he turned, in his misanthropic moods, to Nature, and sought in communion with her solace for the want of human sympathy and companionship. With her boundless prospects, mighty energies, tempestuous fury, indomitable strength, and surpassing loveliness, he found something akin to his

own fiery nature, which responded to her ever-varying moods; accordingly he took her to his heart, and held communion with her, as spirit with spirit.

“Are not the mountains, waves and skies, a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
Is not the love of these deep in my heart,
With a pure passion?”

“The desert, forest, cavern, breaker’s foam,
Were unto him companionship; they spake
A mutual language, clearer than the tome
Of his land’s tongue, which he would oft forsake,
For Nature’s pages gloss’d by sunbeams on the lake.”

Accordingly when he came under the genuine influence of Nature, she seemed to take possession of his entire being, and at such moments of inspiration his burning words have power to thrill us with strange emotion, as though we were listening to the voice of Nature herself. His spirit mingling with the elements, with earth and ocean, sky and air, caught something of their wide expansiveness, and their varied melodies, passing into his verse, are there reproduced apparently without effort. Thus his celebrated description of the tempest among the Alps awakens within us a sense of grandeur and of awe, as if we were ourselves present at the tumult of the elements, when

“From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,
Leaps the live thunder;—not from one lone cloud,
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,
And Jura answers through her misty shroud
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud.”

Again, when reading his description of the cataract of Velino, we are deafened by the continuous roar of the water-fall, while

“The flashing mass foams shaking the abyss.”

How magnificent also is his address to the ocean:

“Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty’s form,
Glasses itself in tempests; in all time,

Calm or convulsed—in breeze, or gale, or storm,
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
Dark-heaving ; boundless, endless, and sublime—
The image of eternity.”

The majestic harmonies of the boundless main which swell the many-voiced symphony of Nature, find an echo in his verse, which brings to the mental ear the solemn music of the rolling waves.

Nor does he confine himself to the sublimer aspects of Nature ; his heart was open also to her gentler moods, which are mirrored in many a beautiful passage in his poems. It is much to be regretted that his descriptions of natural scenery are occasionally marred by the introduction of an incongruous image or an inappropriate metaphor, examples of which will occur to all familiar with his poems.

Having already alluded to his satires, culminating in the “Vision of Judgment,”—the most powerful and perhaps the most characteristic expression of his genius,—his Thor’s hammer wherewith he smote the hypocrisies and conventionalities of the age, I shall not dwell upon them at greater length. The genius of Byron was essentially subjective, and accordingly, his dramas, composed for the most part at Ravenna, are, as a whole, scarcely worthy of their author. Peculiar interest, however, attaches to “Cain,” not only as bearing the impress of the poet’s discordant mind, but also as embodying his revolt against the unworthy conceptions of the divine character and the erroneous statements concerning religious truth, as represented in the popular orthodoxy of the period. Nothing can more forcibly attest the spirit of frenzied intolerance which, after the suppression of the French Revolution, characterized a large section of English society, than the storm of indignation aroused by the publication of this noteworthy drama, which thus strikingly illustrates an important epoch in our national history.

Byron declares that “from the moment he could read, his grand passion was history ;” he tells us also that he

had viewed with attention, not only the field of Waterloo, but those also of Platea, Troy, Mantinea, Leuctra, Choeronea, and Marathon, thus showing that his passion for history had not been a mere boyish enthusiasm. This striking characteristic of his genius is reflected in the pages of "Childe Harold," especially of the 3rd and 4th Cantos, which bear emphatic witness to his sympathy with the glorious achievements of bygone times, and also to his generous enthusiasm for the noble and the heroic in human character and history, under whatsoever form they may have manifested themselves.

Of this we have a striking example in his tribute to the young French hero, General Marceau. ("Childe Harold," ciii. lvi. lvii.)

Brief, brave, and glorious was his young career,—
His mourners were two hosts, his friends and foes ;
And fitly may the stranger lingering here
Pray for his gallant spirit's bright repose ;
For he was Freedom's champion ;

He had kept

The whiteness of his soul, and thus men o'er him wept."

Moreover, notwithstanding his misanthropy, "imbued," as he himself says, "with scorn of man," his sympathy with human suffering was profound, a sentiment which, finding expression in many touching episodes, such as the pathetic account of Bonnivard and his brothers, in the "Prisoner of Chillon," culminates in his *Apostrophe to Rome*.

"The Niobe of nations ! there she stands,
Childless and crownless, in her voiceless woe ;
An empty urn within her wither'd hands
Whose holy dust was scatter'd long ago."

("Childe Harold," iv. lxxix.)

In order to understand the immense effect produced by "Childe Harold" on its first appearance, we must bear in mind the comparatively narrow scope of English poetry during the eighteenth century, when, with the exception of Goldsmith's "Traveller," she never winged

her flight beyond the precincts of our Mother Isle; nor was travelling the commonplace affair which it has since become.

Accordingly, the contemporaries of Byron rejoiced in the ampler horizon opened to them by his "Pilgrimage," with its wide range of interest, historical and biographical, pictorial and artistic, embodied in poetry which, though lacking the simplicity and spirituality of Wordsworth, the mystic subtlety of Coleridge, and the ethereal melody of Shelley and of Keats, has a breadth and vigour of its own, and bears the unmistakable stamp of genius.

Nor must it be forgotten that, through his wonderful personality, and as the representative poet of an epoch, impersonating its rebellious spirit, its unrest, and also its aspirations, Byron, as before stated, was hailed with enthusiasm on the continent, and was thus the means of awakening for English literature the sympathy and admiration of Europe.

I cannot more suitably conclude this brief notice of our poet than by transcribing the following touching passage from Mr. Roden Noel's essay on "Byron and his times."

"Wandering one day in the cemetery of Ferrara, Byron found two epitaphs that struck him forcibly.

'Martini Luigi
Implora pace.'

'Lucrezia Picini
Implora eterna quiete.'"

"These few words," he comments in a letter, "say all that can be said or sought: the dead have had enough of life: all they want is rest, and this they implore. Here is all the helplessness, and humble hope, and death-like prayer, that can arise from the grave. I hope," he continues, "that whoever may survive me, and shall see me put in the foreigners' burying ground at the Lido, within the fortress of the Adriatic, will have those two words, and no more put over me—'Implora Pace!'"

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

1792—1822.

POSSESSED by a spirit of implacable hostility to oppression and intolerance, under all their manifestations, Shelley, like Byron, may be regarded, under one aspect of his genius, as representing the destructive temper of the Revolution. Both believed in the ultimate triumph of Democracy; Byron has recorded his conviction that "There will be bloodshed like water, and tears like mist, but that the people will conquer in the end;" nevertheless, while holding this opinion theoretically, he does not appear to have been cheered by any vision of a brighter future;—with him the spirit of revolt is predominant.

Shelley, on the contrary, having adopted, with passionate earnestness, the underlying principles of the Revolution, especially that of universal brotherhood, and cherishing unswerving faith in the coming Millennium, proclaimed, through the medium of impassioned verse, the final regeneration of mankind through righteousness, patient endurance, gentleness and love. This faith in the ultimate triumph of Right over Wrong, of Truth over Error, and of Love over Hatred, became one of the ruling and inspiring passions of his life, and hence he may perhaps be not inaptly characterized as the poet of aspiration and of hope.

These ideas being out of harmony with the reactionary spirit of the time which, in its recoil from the excesses of the Revolution, manifested a tendency to selfish and apathetic indifference to the higher interests of humanity, Shelley's poems, in which they were embodied, met with

no immediate acceptance. Eventually, however they have doubtless been instrumental, with other agencies, in rekindling that enthusiasm of humanity (an expression originating with him) which, at the outbreak of the Revolution, had fired the nobler spirits of the age, and which, under the form of helpful beneficence, forms so striking a feature of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Thus, in the fulness of time, has been realized his own fervent prayer, embodied in his magnificent "Ode to the West Wind."

"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is ;
What if my leaves are falling like its own !
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

"Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
My spirit ! Be thou me, impetuous one !

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth !
And, by the incantation of this verse,

"Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth,
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind !
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

"The trumpet of a prophecy ! O, Wind,
If winter comes, can Spring be far behind ? "

"This poem," it has been truly said, "is the clarion-cry of hope in the presence of tumultuous ruin and inevitable decay."

The poetry of Shelley, like that of Byron, strikingly illustrates his individuality ; accordingly there are two memorable moments of his early life recorded in his verse which, to quote the words of his latest biographer, "were the consecration of his boyhood."

The story of the first occurs in the Dedication, prefixed to the "Revolt of Islam," and records how, with the recognition of the prevalence in life of tyranny and

wrong, came his high resolve to dedicate himself to the cause of Liberty, and to do unflinching battle with her deadly foes.

This passage "strikes the key-note of the predominating sentiment of Shelley throughout his whole life,—his sympathy with the oppressed!"

"The inspiration of this memorable moment was to elevate and purify Shelley's moral being;—it was hardly less essential that he should dedicate his imagination to the spirit of beauty; this also was accomplished; we read the record of this second spiritual crisis in the 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.'"¹

"Sudden thy shadow fell on me—
I shrieked and clasped my hands in ecstasy!
I vowed that I would dedicate my powers
To thee and thine; have I not kept my vow?"

These two moments may be regarded as introducing Shelley into two distinct spheres of emotion, his enthusiasm of humanity and his love of ideal beauty. These two master-passions, under the influence of one or other of which he habitually lived and worked, formed two independent sources of inspiration, giving birth to two series of poems, the one embodying his aspirations for humanity, and the other reflecting his personal emotions, which were always coloured by his passionate feeling for the Beautiful.

How fervent was Shelley's sympathy with human progress, and how devoted and disinterested was his determination to lose no opportunity of forwarding the cause he had so much at heart, appears from his visit to Ireland in 1812.

Cherishing the conviction, as stated by himself, that the failure of the French Revolution might be traced to the want of a previous moral movement, fitting the people for the possession of freedom, he came to Ireland not as a public agitator, but as a preacher of morality.

¹ "Life of Shelley," by Edward Dowden.

Accordingly, in his Addresses to the Irish nation, he advocates the great principle that political Reform must be based, not upon expediency, but upon virtue and wisdom. In the excited state of public feeling, however, these elevated views, set forth with impassioned eloquence, met with little response; and the young visionary, saddened by the spectacle of squalid misery which met him in the streets of Dublin, and recognizing that he must be content to labour for the future, bade farewell to Ireland, after a sojourn there of seven weeks.

Among the poems of Shelley wherein he appears as the philanthropist fired with zeal for the regeneration of mankind, attention must be called to "Queen Mab," his first important work, written when he was eighteen, issued privately in 1813, and published surreptitiously in 1821.

Against the publication of this juvenile poem he earnestly protested, on the ground "that he could unreservedly condemn its intemperate spirit, and acknowledge its crudity, in all that concerns moral and political speculation, as well as in the subtler discriminations of metaphysical and religious doctrine."

Notwithstanding this disclaimer on the part of its author, great interest attaches to this early production, not only as illustrating in an eminent degree the more striking characteristics of his genius, his wonderful imaginative power, and his passionate love of visionary beauty, but also as exhibiting what may be regarded as the actuating principles of his life, namely, his intense sympathy with human progress and his faith in human perfectibility; it illustrates also the bitter hatred fostered by his unhappy experience at school and at college, with which, at that time, he regarded all traditional beliefs, and established institutions, the source, as he imagined, of the misery which everywhere prevailed, and against which, with the precipitate rashness and the fearless audacity of youth, he proclaimed irreconcilable war.

With reference to this poem, I may, in justice to Shelley, quote the following words of Robert Browning:

"There are growing pains, accompanied by temporary distortion, of the soul also." "Nor will men persist in confounding any more than God confounds, with genuine infidelity and an atheism of the heart, those passionate, impatient struggles of a boy towards distant truth and love, made in the dark."

"The Revolt of Islam," while embodying Shelley's profoundest convictions, social, ethical, and political, is also interesting as revealing, through the character of Laon (the idealized portrait of himself), the hopes and aspirations with which in previous years he had entered upon his Irish campaign; notwithstanding the ill-success which had attended that expedition, he cherished unswerving faith in the principles which then actuated him, and the triumph of which he regarded as essential to the redemption of humanity.

Deeply impressed by the misery which prevailed in England at the close of the war, and indignant at the reactionary policy of the government, he felt that, through the medium of impassioned verse, he had a message to deliver, involving the happiness not only of England, but of Mankind.

It was in this spirit that, amid the solitudes of Marlow, "The Revolt of Islam" was composed. With what unrelenting ardour he devoted himself to his self-imposed task may be imagined when he speaks of the poem as "that which grew, as it were, from 'the agony and bloody sweat' of intellectual travail." In the preface which accompanied the poem, he states that it was undertaken "in the view of kindling within the bosoms of his readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind."

"It was his desire," to quote the words of his biographer, "to present the true ideal of revolution—a national movement based on moral principle, inspired by a passion of justice and a passion of charity, unstained by blood, unclouded by turbulence, and using

material force only as the tranquil putting forth, in act, of spiritual powers."

Among the regenerating principles embodied in this poem, one to which Shelley attached supreme importance is the equality of the sexes.

"Never will peace and human nature meet,
Till free and equal man and woman greet
Domestic peace."

"Can man be free if woman be a slave?" Accordingly, a prominent part in the work of redemption is assigned to Cythna, the heroine. Together with his hatred of oppression and intolerance, this poem reveals also his faith in the contagion of goodness, in the power of noble sentiments, when embodied in thrilling words, to quell the evil passions in the human heart, and to awaken its latent sympathies with the Right and True; hence his belief in the possibility of a bloodless revolution.

It must, however, be confessed that, notwithstanding the nobleness of its dominant ideas, notwithstanding its thrilling incidents, the music of its verse, and the splendour of its descriptions, among which that of the conflict between the eagle and the serpent, in the first canto, and of the wonderful cloud-scape at the beginning of the eleventh canto, are truly magnificent—the poem as a whole is unsatisfactory. The characters are too visionary and the incidents too remote from actual experience to awaken the sympathy and to sustain the interest of the reader.

"The central motive of 'Laon and Cythna,' " it has been truly said, "is surrounded by so radiant a photosphere of imagery and eloquence that it is difficult to fix our gaze upon it, blinded as we are by the excess of splendour."

Among the poems embodying Shelley's "passion for reforming mankind," the highest rank must unquestionably be assigned to his master-work, "Prometheus Unbound." Prometheus, in Shelley's drama, is the idealized representative of Humanity, under its noblest aspect of heroic self-sacrifice. Jupiter is the incarnation

of selfishness and oppression, under their various manifestations, including unjust legislation and other social evils, which impede the progress and development of the human race, and to which he attributed, in great measure, the wretchedness and misery which everywhere prevailed. Accordingly, with his fall, a new era is inaugurated, in which gentleness, virtue, wisdom, endurance, and undying hope shall prevail, and wherein, under their guidance, men shall attain to the perfection for which they were designed, and become like their glorious prototype,

“Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free.”

The universe is represented as sympathizing with the emancipation of humanity. “The world, in which the action is supposed to move, rings with spirit voices; and what these spirits sing is melody more purged of mortal dross than any other poet’s ear has caught, while listening to his own heart’s song or to the rhythms of the world.”¹

While thus embodying in immortal verse, his belief in the regeneration and perfectibility of man, Shelley was one of the first to recognize the importance of intellectual and spiritual agencies in accomplishing the emancipation and elevation of the masses. Accordingly, in his “Masque of Anarchy,” in reply to the question, What art thou, Freedom? he replies:

“Science and Poetry and Thought
Are thy lamps; they make the lot
Of the dwellers in a cot
So serene they curse it not.

“Spirit, Patience, Gentleness,
All that can adorn and bless
Art thou; let deeds, not words express
Thy exceeding loveliness.”

Literary criticism being foreign to my purpose, and having already alluded to the serious blemishes by which

¹ Shelley, by J. A. Symonds.

the beauty of some portions of Shelley's poetry is marred, I shall not pursue the subject ; nor shall I call attention to those painful aspects of his private life which the admirers of his genius cannot but deplore, and which may doubtless be in some measure attributed to the false notions respecting the relations of the sexes which characterized the ethical school to which he had attached himself. Having, moreover, dwelt at some length upon his longer poems, giving expression to his burning hopes for the regeneration of mankind, I must pass over, with only a cursory notice, the numerous productions which represent other phases of his genius. Among these "The Cenci," reflecting in its revolting subject the enduring antagonism between Good and Evil, embodied also in his "Prometheus Unbound," bears witness to his power as a dramatist.

In "Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude," a poem "permeated by the personality of Shelley," he represents the universe as imbued with that spirit of ideal beauty, the vision of which had, in his boyhood, formed so memorable an epoch. In this noteworthy poem he portrays the enthusiastic lover of this visionary beauty, haunted for ever by the loveliness which, gleaming through material objects, ever eludes its votary, and who, yearning to assuage the thirst for sympathy, awakened by his own passionate dream, traverses the world in pursuit of his ideal, and failing to realize it, passes away, aimless and hopeless.

The underlying idea of the poem, which has been characterized as describing "the Nemesis of solitary souls," is thus expressed by his biographer : "Shelley, in 'Alastor,' would rebuke the seeker for beauty and the seeker for truth, however high-minded, who attempts to exist without human sympathy, and he would rebuke the ever unsatisfied idealist in his own heart."

Very beautiful are the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills ;" "The Sensitive Plant ;" "Epipsy-chidion ;" "Adonais," and many other of Shelley's master-works ; in my judgment, however, the palm must

be accorded to his wonderful lyrics; his exquisite lines "To a Skylark," "To Night," his "Ode to the West Wind," "The Cloud," The Last Chorus of "Hellas," and many others, which, for ethereal music and poetic fire, are unsurpassed in the wide range of English literature.

Thus, for all time, to the genuine lover of poetry, Shelley's master-works will be objects of enthusiastic admiration, while to the philanthropist he will be dear, in that, in a selfish and reactionary age, he cherished unswerving faith in the ultimate triumph of freedom, justice, truth and love, and with a prophet's fervour proclaimed the future reign of righteousness and peace.

His vision of a happier social state, based upon human brotherhood, and to be brought about by the gradual operation of moral causes, more especially through the sovereign and all-conquering agency of love; a vision embodied in magnificent poetry may perhaps be regarded as Shelley's chief contribution to the cause of human progress.

Mr. Matthew Arnold has expressed the opinion that Shelley will owe his immortality, not to his poetry, but to his prose, an opinion which cannot but astonish all genuine lovers of poetry. The great value of his prose essays must, however, be universally recognized, embodying as they do, in vigorous and harmonious language, the views of a mind so subtle and original as their author's. His essay on Christianity is especially valuable as justifying the claim which has been made for him, not only as having been one of the first to discern and to appreciate the permanent elements of Christianity, as detached from all that was local and temporary, but also as having been instrumental in awakening men's minds to larger and more enlightened conceptions of the Deity.

Hence it may be well to supplement my brief notice of his influence as a poet with a few extracts from his essay on Christianity, which may serve to show that

when inveighing against Christianity, his invectives were directed, not against the teaching of its founder, for whom he cherished the profoundest veneration, but against a theology which, during its transmission through the ages, had incorporated with those teachings various foreign elements, involving false notions as to the character of God, and which, in his opinion, tended to shackle the human intellect and so to impede the progress of mankind.

The following extracts are abridged, and are occasionally slightly modified verbally, in order to suit the connection. For the Founder of Christianity, for "his extraordinary genius," "his invincible gentleness and benignity," he expresses the profoundest reverence and admiration, and in glowing language he sets forth the truth that the character of God cannot be out of harmony with the moral instincts implanted in the human heart.

After characterizing Jesus Christ as "the Being who has influenced in the most memorable manner the opinions and the fortunes of the human race," he thus proceeds: "It is interesting to inquire in what acceptation Jesus Christ employed the term God," . . . and adds that according to the acceptation of Jesus Christ, "God is the ever-ruling Spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things." By him God is represented as "the Power from which, and through which, the streams of all that is excellent and delightful flow; the Power which models, as they pass, all the elements of this mixed universe to the purest and most perfect shape which it belongs to their nature to assume;" "as the fountain of all goodness, the eternal enemy of pain and evil, the uniform and unchanging motive of the salutary operations of the material world."

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God;" "Blessed are those who have preserved internal sanctity of soul; who are conscious of no secret deceit; who are the same in act, that they are in desire; who

conceal no thought, no tendencies of thought, from their own conscience; who are faithful and sincere witnesses, before the tribunal of their own judgments, of all that passes within their mind; such as these shall see God." "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, that ye may be the sons of your Heavenly Father, who makes the sun to shine on the good and on the evil, and the rain to fall on the just and unjust." "How monstrous a calumny have not impostors dared to advance against the mild and gentle author of this just sentiment, and against the whole tenor of his doctrines and his life, overflowing with benevolence, and forbearance, and compassion! They have represented him asserting that the Omnipotent God—that merciful and benignant Power who scatters equally upon the beautiful earth all the elements of security and happiness—whose influences are distributed to all whose natures admit of a participation in them—that this God has devised a scheme whereby the body shall live after its apparent dissolution, and be rendered capable of indefinite torture. And this is to be done, not because it is supposed that the moral nature of the sufferer would be improved by his tortures, it is done because it is just to be done. Such is the doctrine which Jesus Christ summoned his whole resources of persuasion to oppose. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you;" "such," he says, "is the practice of God, and such must ye imitate, if ye would be the children of God." "Men shall die, they shall go to their graves; where then?" "It appears that we moulder to a heap of senseless dust; Jesus Christ asserts that these appearances are fallacious; another and a more extensive change of being will follow from that mysterious change which we call Death. There shall be no misery, no pain, no fear. The unobscured irradiations from the fountain-fire of all goodness shall reveal all that is mysterious and unintelligible, until the mutual communications of knowledge and of happiness, throughout all thinking natures, constitute a harmony of good that ever varies and never ends."

These extracts may suffice to throw light upon the passionate denunciations found in Shelley's poems against what he regarded as a spurious Christianity, and against the malignant character of God, as represented in some systems of theology.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

1771—1836.

THE revolutionary fervour which characterized the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, while, as we have seen, impressing itself under its various phases, upon the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, failed to leave its mark upon that of their contemporaries, Sir Walter Scott and John Keats.

Nevertheless, each of these distinguished poets, following the bent of his individual genius, has contributed valuable elements to the great cause of human progress.

In reading the life of Scott, we are struck by the remarkable unity by which it is pervaded ;—one leading characteristic of his genius, his enthusiasm for natural scenery, especially when associated with the lore, historical and legendary, of his native land, having its root in his childhood, grew with his growth, and has left its impress alike on his poetry and his prose. In his fifth year he was sent from Edinburgh to Sandy Know, a romantic region, haunted, not only by songs and legends of bygone times, but also by tragic memories of the sufferings endured by the Highlanders during the Rebellion of 1745.

Here, companioned by a shepherd and his flock, the child drank in the sweet influences of nature, together with the legendary lore which floated around him.

He has himself left an interesting record of the impression produced upon his mind by another romantic region, in the neighbourhood of Roxburgh Castle, where

a part of his boyhood was passed. "To this period," he writes, "I can trace distinctly the awaking of that delightful feeling for the beauties of natural objects which has never since deserted me. The romantic feelings predominating in my mind naturally rested upon, and associated themselves with, these grand features of the landscape around me, and the historical incidents or traditional legends connected with many of them gave to my admiration a sort of intense impression of reverence, which at times made my heart feel too big for my bosom. From this time the love of natural beauty, more especially when combined with ancient ruins or remains of our fathers' piety or splendour, became with me an insatiable passion, which, if circumstances had permitted, I would willingly have gratified by travelling over half the globe." With a spirit thus attuned to the melodies of Nature and to the minstrelsy of Scotland, we can understand the fascination exerted over him by the "*Percy Reliques*," and similar collections of National Ballads, to which he was introduced in his thirteenth year, and which fostered the tastes and proclivities to which he was already so passionately addicted. In early youth, during his long excursions on foot and on horseback, he had devoted himself, with all the fervour of his nature, to collecting every fragment of the traditionary ballads of Scotland, many of which survived only in the memory of the peasantry, and the treasures thus amassed furnished materials for his "*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*," his first important work.

While his imagination was thus kindled by the ancient poetry of Scotland, his own creative genius, fired by the recital of Coleridge's "*Christabel*," took a higher flight, and in 1805 he published "*The Lay of the Last Minstrel*," a poem which, while giving a vivid picture of the rude border life of the olden time, exhibits the fiery energy and natural pathos which characterize many of the ancient ballads.

"*The Lay*" at once attained unbounded popularity, and this success, as stated by Mr. Lockhart, at once

determined that literature should form the main business of Scott's life.

With his mind thus intensely preoccupied, and belonging to an old Tory family, it is not surprising that he should have given little heed to the Revolutionary movement which had so deeply stirred the minds of his brother poets in England.

Most keenly, however, did he sympathize with the martial spirit awakened in his countrymen by Napoleon's threatened invasion of England, and in his capacity of Quarter-Master General, he threw himself with enthusiasm into the military movements organized for national defence.

While under the influence of this martial fervour, he composed his second important poem, "*Marmion*," and never since Homer sang the Tale of Troy, has the poet's verse glowed more intensely with the fire of battle than in Scott's description of Flodden Field.

His fame as a poet culminated with the publication of "*The Lady of the Lake*," the appearance of which, with his previous and subsequent works, revealed to the English people the previously unknown scenery of the Scottish Highlands, thus carrying on the revolution, in the popular conception with regard to that romantic region, which, at the close of the previous century, had been inaugurated by the poetry of Robert Burns.

Thenceforth his poetical reputation began to decline, till, eclipsed by the splendid popularity of Byron, he, happily for himself and for the world, abandoned poetry for prose, and became the author of the "*Waverley Novels*." So small is the space, in the literature of the nineteenth century, occupied by his poetry as compared with the immense range of his productions in prose, which have won for him everlasting fame, that people are apt to forget that Walter Scott is also a poet, and as such deserves our gratitude and love.

If we transport ourselves in imagination to the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, and realize the feverish excitement which characterized an age which had wit-

nessed the horrors of the French Revolution, and when men's minds were convulsed by the hopes and fears awakened by the Napoleonic wars, we shall better understand the rapture of applause which, on their successive appearance, greeted the poems of Sir Walter Scott.

Men felt as if suddenly transported by a magician's wand from the lurid atmosphere of a volcanic region, still glowing with subterranean fire, to the romantic scenery of the Highlands, where, amid mountains and lakes and heathery moors, and wooded glens, and crystal streams, they could for awhile forget the turmoil and anxieties of the actual world, and where, while inhaling a purer air, they could listen with delight to tales of chivalry and romance, and follow in imagination the heroic adventures of a bygone age.

The enthusiasm inspired by the poetry of Scott on its first appearance was doubtless due in no small measure to the circumstances of the age; nevertheless, though having no pretension to rank among the world's master-singers, he may claim the honour of being the first English poet, after Shakespeare, to bring poetry home to the hearts of all ranks and classes of men; the prince and the peasant, the noble and the lowly born.

The secret of his charm is not far to seek; the love for story-telling is universal; Scott, with his wonderful power as a narrator, while gratifying this universal taste, charmed also by the freshness, the vividness, and the rich colour of his landscapes, combined with occasional outbursts of Homeric fire, touches of exquisite pathos, and that genuine sympathy with the good, the noble and the true, which imparts to his poetry, as to his prose, a thoroughly healthy tone, recalling the words which he uttered shortly before his death, "It is a comfort to me to think that I have written nothing which, on my death-bed, I should wish blotted."

His genius, finding expression through the medium of prose, as well as of poetry, was endowed with such special characteristics, that in the wide range of English literature he occupies a province peculiarly his own.

His intense sympathy with the spirit of the past enabled him to reproduce the varied features of the olden time with wonderful vitality and truth; his ideal characters have thus become historical types, revealing, under the greatest variety of external circumstances, the elements of our common humanity, and illustrating the deep interest which attaches to human nature amid its manifold and wonderful diversities.

His creations, like those of Shakespeare, are "essentially immortal;" blending with the historical traditions of "our Mother Isle," they form a permanent element in our national life; and having bequeathed to the world a galaxy of men and women breathing the breath of life, and in perfect harmony with their surroundings, a high place among the world's great creators must be accorded to Sir Walter Scott.

JOHN KEATS.

1795—1821.

WHILE expressing a doubt as to whether he should be remembered by posterity, yet, at the same time, recognizing in "Adonais" a poetical master-work, Shelley wrote as follows (Nov. 11, 1821), "I confess I should be surprised if *that* poem were born to an immortality of oblivion." In accordance with this anticipation, the beautiful Elegy written by Shelley to the memory of Keats, forms an indissoluble bond which will for ever unite the names of the two poets, whose mortal remains rest not far the one from the other, overshadowed by the Eternal city.

While resembling each other in some salient features alike of their character and their genius, there was one phase of Shelly's mental activity to which Keats remained a stranger. Both were endowed with the passionate love of ideal beauty, together with that subtle imaginative power which imparts to their descriptions of Nature their unique, I am tempted to say, their magical charm.

In addition, however, to his worship of intellectual Beauty, Shelley, as we have seen, was possessed by a passion for reforming the world, and accordingly threw himself heart and soul into the social and political movement inaugurated by the French Revolution. Keats, on the contrary, interested only in his art, and possessed by a yearning passion for the Beautiful, had no sympathy with the antagonistic spirit which formed so striking a characteristic of Shelley, and which he has embodied in his "Prometheus Unbound," and other poems; the spirit, namely, which, in the cause of

humanity, braves danger, courts opposition, and is ready to endure unflinchingly the extremity of pain; hence, while the poetry of Shelley reflects the varied features of his age, that of Keats appears to be entirely uninfluenced by passing events. In his poems, we discern no trace of the questions, social, political and theological, which had recently so deeply stirred the hearts of men. In his day the excitement caused by the Revolution was passing away, and while Shelley strove, with passionate ardour, to re-kindle the popular enthusiasm for the great principles which had then been proclaimed, Keats, following the bent of his genius, kept aloof from politics, and with the ardour of a devotee, worshipped that supreme and universal Beauty, which he regarded as the all-pervading spirit of the universe.

The year 1815 witnessed the publication of Shelley's "Alastor," and the composition by Keats, then in his twentieth year, of the poem which first proved him to be endowed with genuine poetic fire,—his celebrated sonnet, "On first looking into Chapman's Homer."

At a somewhat earlier period, enraptured by the perusal of Spenser, his genius, "at poesy's divine first finger-touch," had been suddenly awakened, and under the enchantment of the "Faerie Queen," he had given birth to his earliest poetical attempt, "Lines in imitation of Spenser," which, with other poems, appeared in his first volume, published in 1817. Special interest attaches to one of these juvenile poems, entitled "Sleep and Poetry," as affording us a glimpse into the inner mind of the youthful bard,—with his lofty dreams and aspirations.

"O Poesy! for thee I grasp my pen,
That am not yet a glorious denizen
Of thy wide heaven."

and again:

"O for ten years, that I may overwhelm
Myself in poesy! so may I do the deed
That my own soul has to itself decreed."

The rapture awakened in Keats by the perusal of Chapman's Homer was in harmony with his enthusiastic admiration for the beautiful creations of Greek Mythology, the resuscitation of which, through the medium of his verse, was with him an ever-inspiring dream.

Having no knowledge of Greek, his acquaintance with ancient Mythology was derived entirely from English books. More especially was he fascinated with the Mythology connected with the Moon; the story of the passion entertained by the Moon-Goddess for the shepherd-prince Endymion, had long haunted his imagination, and having inspired one of his earlier poems, was subsequently embodied in his Mythological romance, entitled "Endymion."

"Not only had the charm of this old pastoral nature-myth of the Greeks interwoven itself in his being with his natural sensibility to the physical and spiritual spell of moonlight; but deeper and more abstract meanings than its own had gathered about the story in his mind. The divine vision which haunts Endymion in dreams is for Keats symbolical of Beauty itself, and it is the passion of the human soul for beauty which he attempts, more or less consciously, to shadow forth in the quest of the shepherd-prince after his love."¹ A symbolical meaning seems also to pervade the narrative in the fourth book, "which," to quote again the author of the foregoing passage, "only becomes partially intelligible when we take it as a parable of a soul's experience in pursuit of the ideal. Let a soul enamoured of the ideal,—such would seem the argument—once suffer itself to forget its goal, and to quench for a time its longings in the real, nevertheless it will be still haunted by that lost vision; which, amidst all intoxications, disappointment and lassitude, will still dog it, until it awakens at last to find that the reality which has thus allured it derives from its ideal its power to charm,—that it is after all but a reflection from the ideal, a phantom of it." The fundamental idea em-

¹ Keats. Sidney Colvin.

bodied in the poem finds still more forcible expression in the following passage from the pen of Mrs. F. W. Owen. "He, (Endymion) knows that all love and beauty is one, that the truth of the finite is the truth of the infinite; that the fitful and dimly realized beauty in common life and the beauty gained through suffering, is one with the beauty of life and of joy; . . . Being made one with eternal and universal love, the spirit is at rest for ever."

In this remarkable poem, intermingled with beauties of the highest order, the defects are so obvious that they could not have escaped the censure of the most friendly critic; nevertheless they afford no excuse for the ruthless treatment of the poem and of its author by "Blackwood" and the "Quarterly Review." The letter which he addressed to his publisher on the occasion, is interesting, as revealing his consciousness of his own shortcomings; his determination that his poetry should be the expression of his own mind; together with his indifference to the praise or censure of critics.

The following passages, written on another occasion, are also interesting. "I have not the slightest feeling of humility towards the public, or to anything in existence but the Eternal Being, the principle of Beauty and the memory of great men. . . . I never wrote one single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought. I think I shall be among the English poets after my death."

Few literary phenomena are more remarkable than the rapidity with which Keats cast off, in a great measure, the blemishes which had so seriously marred the beauty of "Endymion;" by a sudden bound he achieved well-nigh perfection in his art, and in the comparatively short period of twenty months produced the series of master-works which, in fulfilment of his prophecy, have secured for him a high and permanent place among the poets of England.

In "Hyperion" the poet's theme is the dethronement of the elemental gods, the Titanic forces of Nature, who pass away to make room for the Olympians, in whom

are personified the varied attributes of humanity. With reference to this poem, Shelley wrote, Feb. 15, 1821; "If the 'Hyperion' be not grand poetry, none has been produced by our contemporaries."

Grand indeed is the opening picture "of grey-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone," and of his sister Rhea:

"The tender spouse of gold Hyperion."

Wonderfully grand also is the description of

"Blazing Hyperion on his orb'd fire,"

who bids defiance to the newly enthroned gods;

"Fall!—No, by Tellus and her briny robes!
Over the fiery frontier of my realms,
I will advance a terrible right arm,
Shall scare that infant Thunderer, rebel Jove,
And bid old Saturn take his throne again."

In the second book, we are introduced to the vast assemblage of the unsceptred gods, each member of the mournful company being brought before the mental eye with marvellous pictorial power. They are addressed by Saturn who, in conclusion inquires,

"How we can war, how engine our great wrath!"

The answer of Oceanus embodies the underlying thought of the poem, namely, that progress is the universal law. Speaking as one of the elemental gods, he reminds Saturn that,

"We fall by course of Nature's law, not force
Of thunder, or of Jove. . . .
Thou art not the beginning nor the end;
From chaos and parental darkness came
Light. . . .
Then thou first-born, and we the giant race,
Found ourselves ruling new and beauteous realms.

So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty born of us,
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old darkness."

Upon the forlorn Titans there breaks the splendour of Hyperion,—“the strong Sun-God invincible.” “It was the light which streams across the ages, the light of hope and progress which binds into one all mystery and worship, all beauty and all love.”

In the third book

“Apollo is once more the golden theme;”—

who, since his birth in Delos, had been watched over by Mnemosyne, sister of Saturn.

“Where was he, when the Giant of the Sun
Stood bright, amid the sorrow of his peers?

He in the morning twilight wander’d forth,
Beside the osiers of a rivulet,
Full ankle-deep in lilies of the vale,”

and as he listened to the murmurous noise of waves,

“He wept, and his bright tears
Went trickling down the golden bow he held.”

When suddenly,

“With solemn step an awful goddess came,”

it was Mnemosyne, who inquires the cause of his grief. He himself cannot explain the mystery, he knows not why he weeps; he feels only the yearning for “some unknown thing.”

“Are there not other regions than this Isle?
What are the stars?

Point me out the way
To any one particular beauteous star,
And I will flit unto it with my lyre,
And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss.”

He questions her concerning the thunder:

“What divinity
Makes this alarum in the elements,
While I here idle listen on the shores
In fearless yet in aching ignorance?

Mute thou remainest—Mute? Yet I can read
A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:”

“The new knowledge must come to himself, and the new life must be ushered in with suffering.”

“Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush
All the immortal fairness of his limbs,
Most like the struggle at the gate of death,
Or liker still to one who should take leave
Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
As hot as death’s is chill, with fierce convulse
Die into life.”

“And with this death into new life the wondrous fragment breaks off. It was a fitting ending. We long to have known the whole story, but we have to rest content that it leaves Apollo born for the world and Hyperion still unconquered; progress triumphant, even through disastrous change and keenest suffering, and unity eternal.”¹

The remaining poems of Keats, which illustrate other phases of his genius, are too well known to require more than a passing notice.

“Isabella, or the pot of Basil,” is a story of love and of agony, taken from a tale of Boccaccio, the revolting details of which have been wrought by Keats, with wonderful skill, into a poem, exquisitely melodious, full of pathos and of passion, and glowing with the rich colour of the middle ages.

“The Eve of St. Agnes” is also a story of love, not, however, of despair, but of rapture and delight; the characters introduced, not only the lovers, Madeline and Porphyro, but also the venerable beadsman and the aged crone, all breathe the breath of life; the descriptions, glowing with the richest colour, are wonderfully picturesque, while the whole is invested with so unique a charm pictorial and romantic, that it would be difficult in any language to find a more perfect narrative poem.

“The Eve of St. Mark” is a fragment, “the interest of which,” to borrow the words of Mr. Sidney Colvin, “lies in two things; first its pictorial brilliance, and charm of workmanship; and second, its relation to and

¹ “John Keats, a Study.” F. M. Owen.

influence on later English poetry. Keats in this piece anticipates, in a remarkable degree, the feeling and method of the pre-Raphaelite school."

The story of "Lamia, the serpent-lady," "both enchantress and victim of enchantment," is deeply interesting, as indicating the conflicting emotions which were agitating the poet's soul at the time of its composition. There is truth in his own criticism on this weird and wondrous poem; "I am certain," he says, "there is that sort of fire in it which must take hold of people in some way, give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensations." Whether the influence exerted over the reader be one of attraction or repulsion, he cannot fail to appreciate the exquisite beauty of the descriptions, together with the imaginative power displayed in a poem, characterized by Lord Houghton as "quite the perfection of narrative poetry." This remarkable series of poems is completed by the "Odes," which are very precious, as giving us a deeper insight into the individuality of the poet than his more elaborate productions.

Thus the "Ode to the Nightingale" gives melodious expression to the brooding sadness which possessed his soul, inspired by sorrow for the sufferings and death of his beloved brother, and by melancholy forebodings of his own impending doom.

The "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the most perfect of his minor poems, rises to a higher sphere, and like the "Attic Shape" which it commemorates, bears witness to the undying principle of Beauty, which links the present with the far distant past. In this exquisite poem, to borrow the words of Mr. Lowell, "Music and meaning float together, accordant as swan and shadow, on the smooth element of his verse."

Very beautiful also are the remaining Odes, "Psyche," "On Melancholy," "On Indolence," and the exquisite "Ode on Autumn," which is invested with peculiar interest as the last which he wrote.

The gospel proclaimed by Keats is embodied in the opening line of "Endymion," "A thing of beauty is

a joy for ever," together with one of the concluding lines of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

He was one of the first, if not the first, to discern the necessary relation subsisting between Truth and Beauty, and to recognize both as fountains of the purest and most elevated joy; hence he reconciled his indefatigable pursuit of Beauty, as his sole aim in life, with that idea of devotion to human service, by which he believed that it could alone be justified.

This abstract idea of the Beautiful, not merely as the ornament of life, and not merely as the source of the highest gratification, but also as an intellectual and spiritual agency of mighty power may be regarded as the grand contribution made by Keats to the progress of humanity.

Happy will it be for the world when the recognition of the Beautiful, freed from all contaminating adjuncts, and regarded as a purifying, elevating, and joy-inspiring agency, shall become an actuating principle with all who are zealous to promote the highest interests of humanity.

GERMANY.

JOHANN WOLFGANG GOETHE.

1750—1832.

ENGLAND, during the eighteenth century, rich in every other province of literature,—philosophy, history and fiction,—produced no poetry of the highest order, an honour reserved for Germany, where, during the latter half of the century, a brilliant star arose, destined to illumine not only the Fatherland, but the whole literary world.

Goethe's advent was the more significant because, while Italy and England could boast, as supreme among their fellow-bards, the one her Dante, and the other her Shakespeare, no great poet had as yet appeared in Germany; at length she also had the satisfaction of hailing, in Goethe's "*Faust*," a poetical master-work, embodying in immortal verse the spirit of the age which gave it birth, just as the characteristics of the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries are mirrored in the "*Divina Commedia*," and in the Shakespearian dramas.

For a considerable time before the appearance of Goethe, French taste and French culture had reigned supreme in Germany, and the artificial restraints of the Pseudo-Classical school, thus imposed upon her native literature, had tended to retard its free development. At the period under consideration the modern spirit was beginning to rebel against the tyranny of this foreign yoke, the injurious effects of which upon the authors of the day was only too apparent. The work of emancipation, which was to be finally accomplished by Goethe,

was initiated by two remarkable men, who exerted a powerful influence over his genius: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, morally and intellectually one of Germany's noblest sons, and Gottfried Herder. Goethe gratefully recognized his obligation to Lessing's "Laocoon," a literary master-work, which, in the domain of criticism, may be regarded as an epoch-making book. In this work, the author defines the characteristic spheres of the several fine arts, and while laying down the fundamental principles which obtain in painting, sculpture, and poetry, he assigns to the latter the highest rank. Alluding to the distinction there pointed out between plastic and speaking art (*Bildende und Redende Kunst*), Goethe says: "All the consequences of this splendid thought were illumined to us as by a lightning flash." Through his "Laocoon" and his "Dramaturgie," Lessing shattered for ever the conventional system of the grand siècle, and thus emancipated the poets of the rising generation from the fatal incubus which had so long paralyzed the energies of their predecessors.

The influence, in the same direction, exerted over Goethe by Herder, with whom, at the critical age of twenty-one, he came into personal relations, was still more important. Endowed with genuine enthusiasm, and distinguished by breadth of literary culture, Herder, recognizing in Rousseau, with his unique and passionate individuality, the eloquent exponent of the aspirations of the age, recommended his writings to Goethe, who became deeply imbued with their spirit. By Herder, moreover, he was introduced to the poetry of the East, to national songs, to Homer, Ossian, and to the contemporary literature of England. Being a profound student and admirer of Shakespeare, Herder revealed to Goethe the transcendent power of the great English poet, and it was while under the influence of his Shakespearian enthusiasm, that, in 1771-1773, he produced his "Goetz von Berlichingen," his first noteworthy drama. The spirit of revolt against authority and tradition which, at this period characterized at once Goethe and his age,

found its prototype in his hero, Goetz of the iron hand, a brave and fearless knight, who, early in the sixteenth century, amid the conflicting interests of that turbulent period, stood forth, the zealous champion of what he believed to be a just and righteous cause. In Germany, the drama, notwithstanding its serious blemishes as a work of art, especially its anachronisms, in transferring to the sixteenth the opinions and controversies of the eighteenth century, was hailed with enthusiasm, as an emphatic protest against the conventionalism of the French classical school, and as heralding the return to nature and to reality demanded by the up-rising spirit of the age. Equally noteworthy, as reflecting the tone and temper of the age under another aspect, was Goethe's second important work; "*The Sorrows of Werther.*" The materialistic and sceptical spirit, characteristic of the eighteenth century, which, in England, had been partially neutralized by the preaching of the Wesleys, and other agencies, was still dominant in Germany. In accordance with the philosophy of the day, which taught that Truth, in regard to spiritual realities, was inaccessible to human reason, Religion was in many quarters either practically ignored, or denounced as a baleful superstition.

No adequate scope being thus afforded for men's higher aspirations, they experienced those feelings of dissatisfaction, of life-weariness, of profound unrest, characteristic of the age.

The prevalence of mental disease, the symptoms of which, drawn in some measure from his own experience, Goethe has depicted in "*Werther*" with such consummate skill, may be inferred from the boundless enthusiasm which greeted its appearance. "*Werther's Malady*," it has been truly said, "was not the malady of an individual only, but of an age. Thoughtful men had outlived their beliefs, their institutions, their customs; all around them was a world touched by the feeling of decay."

The same thought is still more forcibly expressed by

Carlyle ; " Werther," he says, " is but the cry of that dim, rooted pain, under which all thoughtful men of a certain age were languishing ; it paints the misery, it passionately utters the complaint ; and heart and voice all over Europe loudly and at once respond to it."

It cannot be matter of surprise that, under conditions so depressing, suicide should have been regarded as affording a welcome means of deliverance. Accordingly, in a world so forlorn, Werther derives consolation from the thought that, " hemmed in as he is, man ever keeps in his heart the sweet feeling of freedom, and that this dungeon—can be left when he likes."

The immediate and far-reaching popularity of " Werther " was doubtless due, not only to the passionate fervour with which it echoed the despairing cry of the age, but also to its exquisite delineations of natural scenery, a novel feature in German literature, to the charm where-with the author invests his heroine, and to the unrivalled beauty of his style.

I have dwelt thus at length upon Goethe's " Goetz von Berlichingen " and " Werther," the first noteworthy fruits of his genius, because, as reflecting certain aspects of the age, they are intimately associated with his great life-work, the poem upon which chiefly rests his claim to immortality, " Faust," which may perhaps be not inappropriately characterized as the epic of the individual soul ; the " Paradise Lost," and " Paradise Regained," not of humanity but of man.

The first part, conceived and partially executed in the poet's early youth, 1770-1775, appeared as a fragment in 1790. Resumed at Rome, in the course of the same year, it was published in its present form in 1808 ; while the second part, which, with the exception of the third and part of the first act, was the work of his old age, only attained completion on July 20th, 1831, the manuscript having been finally sealed up on his last birthday, Aug. 28th of the same year. The poem having thus been his life companion for a period of sixty years, growing with his growth, and unfolding step by step,

may be regarded, under some aspects, as the poet's autobiography.

"The 'Faust' legend, the weird embodiment of Mediævalism, had lived in the spirit of the German people for 200 years before its adoption by Goethe." Under the influence of his genius it became, not only the poetical exponent of various elements fermenting in the age, some of which had already found expression in "Goetz" and "Werther," but also the mirror in which were reflected the successive stages of his own intellectual and spiritual development, as he emerged from what he himself characterized as his state of "unspeakable spiritual want," into the calm and joyous recognition of the highest truth.

This feature of "Faust" is especially interesting, as illustrating one most striking characteristic of Goethe's genius, namely, that the productions of his creative imagination were almost invariably based upon his own emotional experiences. The key to the poem is found in "The Prologue in Heaven;"—man is there represented as a finite being, capable of reflecting the divine image, and aspiring after its realization;—nevertheless, dowered with free will, he is liable to temptation, and may choose amiss;—the retribution which invariably accompanies such aberrations tends to their correction, till at length the erring spirit, purified by suffering and by the discipline of life, is prepared to reach its heaven-appointed goal.

From Faust's opening soliloquy we learn that, in his passionate striving after knowledge, isolating himself from his fellow-men, and renouncing the common joys, affections, and sympathies of humanity—self-centred, he has devoted himself to a life of arduous intellectual toil. He has traversed all the realms of human knowledge, Philosophy, Medicine, Jurisprudence, and Theology, and at length, recognizing with despair that the Truth, which he so ardently covets, is beyond the reach of human intelligence, he proclaims as the result of his life-long, all-absorbing quest, the agonized conviction, "That we in truth can nothing know."

Thus baffled in his thirst for knowledge, when sought through the exercise of his intellectual powers, he has recourse to Magic, and gazes with ecstasy upon the mystic scroll which unveils the working of the universe.

“How all things live and work, and ever blending,
Weave one vast whole from Being's ample range!
How powers celestial, rising and descending,
Their golden buckets ceaseless interchange!
Their flight on rapture-breathing pinions winging,
From heaven to earth their genial influence bringing,
Through the wide sphere their chimes melodious ringing!

“A wondrous show! but ah! a show alone!
Where shall I grasp thee, infinite nature, where?
Ye breasts, ye fountains of all life, whereon
Hang heaven and earth, from which the withered heart
For solace yearns, ye still impart
Your sweet and fostering tides—where are ye—where?
Ye gush, and must I languish in despair?”

Again disappointed in his effort to penetrate to the inscrutable fount of Being, he summons the Earth-spirit, from whom he hopes to wrest the hidden secret of the universe. The song of the Spirit leaves him still unsatisfied.

“Thus time's whirring loom unceasing I ply,
And weave the life-garment of deity.”

Conscious of his dignity as the image of God, yet incapacitated, as he believes, by the very nature of his faculties from penetrating behind phenomena, he is overwhelmed with despair and, like Werther, finds solace in the prospect of suicide. He is on the point of quaffing the poison which is to bring him deliverance, when melodious chimes from the neighbouring church, together with choral voices, announcing the solemn dawn of Easter-day, draw the goblet from his lips.

Faust hears the message, but his faith is weak.

“Aloft to yonder spheres I dare not soar,
Whence sound the tidings of great joy;
And yet, with this sweet strain, familiar when a boy,
Back it recalleth me to life once more.

"Then would celestial love, with holy kiss,
Come o'er me in the Sabbath's stilly hour,
While, fraught with solemn and mysterious power,
Chim'd the deep-sounding bell and prayer was bliss.

O still sound on, thou sweet celestial strain!
The tear-drop flows,—Earth, I am thine again!"

Thus recalled to earth, he wanders forth, and joins the crowd of holiday folk who are streaming through the city-gate; after listening to their talk, describing their various sources of sensuous enjoyment, he becomes more clearly aware of the duality of his nature.

"Two souls, alas! are lodged within my breast,
Which struggle there for undivided reign;
One to the earth, with obstinate desire
And closely cleaving organs, still adheres;
Above the mist, the other doth aspire,
With sacred vehemence, to purer spheres!"

The stirring of his emotional instincts, after their prolonged and unnatural suppression, is symbolized by the appearance of the poodle, who, on the invitation of Faust, accompanies him as he reenters his study. There, under the impulse of the higher mind awakened by the Easter hymn, his spirit yearns for divine revelation, and taking down the New Testament, he begins to translate the first chapter of St. John's Gospel. Finding, however, that the meaning of the original can only be reached through the intellect, the inadequacy of which as an instrument for acquiring knowledge he has already recognized, he perceives that, from his point of view, a divine revelation is impossible. With this discovery, he finally abandons as hopeless the pursuit of Truth, which heretofore had been the absorbing purpose of his life; at the same moment the poodle expands "huge as a hippopotamus;"—finally, "in likeness of a dog no longer seen," he melts into a mist, whence, in the dress of a travelling scholar, emerges Mephistopheles, the Devil of the eighteenth century. This presentation, as an objective reality, of the spirit which evermore denies, which,

regarding man as a mere finite being, sneers at all belief in spiritual realities, and concentrates its energies upon self-gratification, regardless of the claims of others, is a creation unique in literature.

Mephistopheles incarnates one aspect of the age, and portrays with consummate skill the final outcome of its materialistic philosophy. Faust, baffled in his striving after the Infinite, rebelling against what he regards as the limitation of his faculties, and conscious, at the same time, of cravings which have long been suppressed, is prepared to enter into a compact with the Evil One. His determination to forego his intellectual striving and, in exchange, to drain to its depths the cup of sensual gratification, finds expression in the following lines :

“Vainly I have aspired too high ;
I'm on a level but with such as thou ;
Me the great spirit scorn'd, defied ;
Nature from me herself doth hide ;
Rent is the web of thought ; my mind
Doth knowledge loathe of every kind.
In depths of sensual pleasure drowned,
Let us our fiery passions still !”

While recognizing the worthlessness, as he thinks, of the knowledge so painfully acquired, he exclaims :

“I feel it, I have heap'd upon my brain
The gather'd treasure of man's thought in vain ;
And when at length from studious toil I rest,
No power, new-born, springs up within my breast ;
A hair's breadth is not added to my height,
I am no nearer to the infinite.”

Very striking is the moral drawn by Mephistopheles.

“Mortal ! The loftiest attributes of men,
Reason and knowledge, only thus condemn ;—
Still let the Prince of lies, without control,
With shows and mocking charms delude thy soul ;
I have thee unconditionally then !”

Auerbach's cellar, and the witches' kitchen, to which Faust is introduced at the opening of his new career, doubtless typify certain aspects of social life from which,

under the influence of Mephistopheles, the scoffing Devil, who evermore denies, all higher elements having been eliminated, nothing is left but the twin Demons of Dulness and of Bestiality. There, captivated by the image of female loveliness in the magic mirror, and under the influence of the witch's cordial, intended to inflame the sensual passions, Faust is prepared to play his part in the Gretchen tragedy, one of the greatest triumphs of creative genius.

From Margaret's first meeting with Faust, as she is returning from confession, "all innocence her virgin soul," till the awful denouement in the dungeon, the tragic story unfolds itself in scene after scene of wonderful beauty and pathos.

Inexpressibly touching in the Zwinger scene, is Gretchen's appeal to the Mater Dolorosa; while nothing can exceed the solemn pathos of the scene in the Cathedral, where, seeking solace in her agony, she hears her own remorseful thoughts echoed by the voice of the fiend, and where the heart-appalling words of the anthem, blending with the roll of the organ, and interpreted by her own accusing conscience, seem to proclaim her everlasting doom. We are thus prepared for the closing scene of this pitiful tragedy, where, in the dungeon, cowering in the straw and awaiting the headsman, Gretchen is found by Faust, who, stung to the quick by horror and remorse, leaving the mad revelry and the sensual allurements of the Blocksberg, has hastened to her rescue. I must not pause to follow her distracted moods, drawn by a master-hand, as memory dimly recalls the events of the past; at length the supreme moment arrives; rejecting her lover's proffered deliverance, she refuses to follow him, and Faust utters that bitter cry: "Would I had ne'er been born!" Margaret having passed through the fiery ordeal, purified by suffering and recognizing that she has the divine forgiveness, appeals from the judgment of men to a higher tribunal:

"Judgment of God! To thee my soul I give!"

while Faust, punished only through the misery and degradation of the woman whom he loves, disappears with Mephistopheles. That Faust has not entirely succumbed to the evil influences of the Tempter is evinced by his bitter remorse, together with his earnest efforts to save his victim. Accordingly, departing from the Mediæval legend, which represents him as expiating his crimes in Hell-fire, the modern poet, at the end of the first part leaves the doom of his hero still uncertain. A second part, setting forth the subsequent career of Faust while still a denizen of earth, and also after leaving this terrestrial sphere, is consequently essential for the completion of the poem.

In accordance with the original proposal of Mephistopheles, on starting with Faust on their aerial journey,

“The little world, and then the great we’ll see.”

the horizon of the second part is far ampler than that of the first. Embracing the more complicated phenomena of human existence, Politics, Art, War, and Industrial Enterprise, in all of which Faust is represented as playing a conspicuous part, a striking contrast is presented to his previous life of solitary individuality, and the lesson is taught that, not in isolation, but in helpful co-operation with his fellow-men, can the individual attain to the full development of his powers.

To attempt an interpretation of the various personages and situations, the masquerading groups, and strange phantasmagoria, wherewith the poet endeavours to shadow forth the varied interests and the inscrutable problems of human existence, as they appear in the successive acts of the drama, would not only surpass my power, but would here be out of place.

I must therefore content myself with stating, very briefly, what appears to be the fundamental idea of the poem, as set forth in the opening and the concluding scenes.

In the first part, Faust, seeking his own selfish gratification, had plunged the object of his love into an

abyss of ruin. In the opening of the second part, he is introduced, restless and sleepless, overwhelmed by the terrible memories of the past. Ariel and his Elfin choir typify the healing influences of time and nature; hovering round him, they draw forth the burning arrows of remorse, assuage the cruel strife that rends his heart, and summon him, casting sleep aside, to return to the active duties of life.

“Gird thee for the high endeavour,
Shun the crowd’s ignoble ease!
Fails the noble spirit never,
Wise to think and prompt to seize.”

The break of day, heralded by the rising sun, symbolizes the new life-career upon which he is about to enter. Omitting the intermediate acts of the drama, and passing on to the concluding scenes of the fifth, Faust appears in extreme old age; physically blind, while his spirit is full of light; he renounces magic, and devotes himself, heart and soul, to the completion of his self-appointed task, to render secure the land newly recovered from the ocean, the home of a busy and thriving population.

In his dying speech he proclaims, as the result of his life-long experience, the great truth that genuine freedom is no mere external possession; that it is the permanent enfranchisement of the human spirit, which can only be achieved and maintained through constantly repeated effort and by submission to a higher law; he likewise teaches the lesson which may be regarded as the fundamental idea embodied in the poem, that man’s true happiness is to be sought, not in selfish gratification, but in self-sacrificing devotion to the service of his fellow-men.

How fully Goethe had realized this truth appears from the following passage from a letter addressed to Carlyle, Dec. 27, 1827.¹ Having expressed his deep sympathy with every effort to diffuse, through the

¹ “Goethe and Carlyle.” Prof. F. Max Müller.

agency of literature, among nations and individuals, sentiments of mutual appreciation and respect, he thus concludes :

“ Finally declaring as my own, and inculcating as the essence of true wisdom, the Testament of St. John, ‘ Little children love one another.’ ”

Having adopted the Faust legend as the groundwork of his poem, Goethe necessarily embodied his conception of spiritual realities in the forms of Mediæval Catholicism. Accordingly, in the struggle between the angels and the demons over the body of Faust, the demons, driven back by a shower of roses, typifying eternal love, which to them become burning flames, are overpowered ; the angels rise, bearing with them the immortal part of Faust.

Their song, as they ascend, embodies the profound truth that the providence of God, guiding men from error and perplexity to freedom and light, corresponds to the innate tendency to goodness and truth implanted in the human soul.

“ Saved is this noble soul from ill,
Our spirit-peer. Whoever
Strives forward with unswerving will,
Him can we aye deliver ;
And if with him celestial love
Hath taken part,—to meet him
Come down the angels from above,
With cordial hail they greet him.”

These lines, according to Goethe’s own confession to Eckermann, contain the key to Faust’s salvation ; “ in Faust himself there is an activity which becomes constantly higher and purer to the end, and from above there is eternal love coming to his aid. This harmonizes perfectly with our religious views, according to which we cannot obtain heavenly bliss through our own strength alone, but with the assistance of divine grace.”

Goethe recognized that the human spirit is an imperishable essence, an ever-unfolding energy, which, like the sun, appears only to the bodily eye to set, but in

reality shines on without intermission. The soul of Faust, on first leaving its tenement of clay, is represented as not yet free from the dross of earth, and it is intimated, by the more perfect angels, that God's eternal love is alone able to purify the spirit from the lower elements with which it has been associated, and to bring it into harmony with eternal goodness. Faust is at length freed from the old coil of earthly bondage, and Gretchen can exclaim with joy that his first youthful strength shines forth, full and beautiful, from its ethereal robes.

"To guide him, be it given to me;
Still dazzles him the new-born day."

The mystical chorus, with which the poem concludes, reminds us that all things visible and transient are only types of the unseen and eternal; only symbolically can the world beyond be represented; there will be perfected what on earth is fragmentary or incomplete; 'the ever-womanly,' type of pure, sacrificing love, the innermost core of woman's nature, and the highest symbol of divine love, is represented as guiding the human spirit on its heavenward ascent.

CHORUS MYSTICUS.

"All of mere transient date
As symbol showeth;
Here, the inadequate
To fulness groweth;
The indescribable,
Lo! here 'tis done;
The ever-womanly
Still lures us on."

Having dwelt thus at length upon "Faust," wherein are reflected the materialistic tendencies of the eighteenth and the religious revival of the nineteenth century, I must content myself with a cursory notice of his other poetical master-works; among which his "Iphigenia" stands preeminent; additional interest attaches to this beautiful drama, as illustrating the recently revived love

of Hellenism, which contrasts so forcibly with Mediævalism, as embodied in "Faust."

In Goethe's "Iphigenia," very striking is the character of the heroine, who with exquisite tenderness, combines the deepest reverence for truth, unswerving loyalty, and a determined will. Terrible is the temptation to save her brother, by telling a falsehood, and deceiving her benefactor, a temptation from which, true to her higher instincts, she emphatically recoils. The nearest parallel in the Greek drama, to the character of Goethe's Iphigenia, is the Neoptolemus of Sophocles.

"Tasso," another of Goethe's master-works, may be characterized as a dramatic poem rather than as a drama, and for its perfection of style, and the exquisite beauty of individual scenes and passages, it can hardly be surpassed. Its occurrences are those of thought and feeling, not of action, and result from the conflicting elements in the mind of the poet, whose passionate, enthusiastic, but, at the same time, irritable temperament, offers a striking contrast to that of Antonio, the duke's secretary, the impersonation of worldly prudence and sagacity, and who, while affecting to look down with contempt upon poetic genius, at the same time envies the homage paid to it by mankind. Leonora, the duke's sister, whose name is indissolubly associated with that of the poet, is drawn with great delicacy and tact, and in the long array of Goethe's female characters, forms one of the most charming and characteristic figures.

By the side of the highly born Leonora, accustomed to the atmosphere of courts, as illustrating the wide range of the poet's sympathies, I am tempted to place the homely peasant girl, Dorothea, strong, tender, and true, a pure and noble type of womanhood.

As the heroine of "Hermann and Dorothea," a charming idyllic poem, perfect of its kind, wherein the poet, while delineating the life of a small German town, has, as he himself tells us, endeavoured to mirror, on a smaller scale, the great world-movements of the period, she will hold a humble place among the immortal

creations of genius, and generation after generation will continue to feel the invigorating influence of her frank, helpful, generous nature. Among the varied beauties of this simple idyll I must not linger, nor must I dwell upon Goethe's wonderful lyrics, which, like those of Burns, gushed forth spontaneously as the song of birds. One of his most striking poems, however, his "Metamorphosis of Plants," wherein he unfolds his theory of vegetable growth and development, is so eminently scientific, as to render essential a brief allusion to the great poet, as also the man of science. Possessed by an intense desire to penetrate the mysteries of Nature, which exercised over him a peculiar fascination, he devoted a considerable portion of his life to the study of her physical and physiological phenomena, into which he threw himself with passionate enthusiasm. From the perpetual agitation of feelings and opinions in himself and others, he sought relief, as he himself tells us, "in the sublime repose which is produced by contact with the great and eloquent silence of Nature."

The grand conception of an original type, of which all the variations in organic structures are modifications, fired his imagination, and awakened within him an intense enthusiasm, which carried him through the laborious investigations required for its verification, and sustained him under the indifference with which his important discoveries were received by his scientific contemporaries.

His theory of the Metamorphosis of Plants, established by him at the cost of long and patient labour, is now, in its essential features, accepted by scientific men, as is also his application of the same theory to the structural development of animals. His conception of the vertebral structure of the skull, which flashed upon his brain in 1790, in the Jewish cemetery in Venice, has, it is true, been modified by subsequent observation; nevertheless his morphological investigations were in advance of the age, and by directing attention to the laws of growth and development, gave a powerful im-

pulse to modern scientific research, which has issued in the splendid discoveries known under the general name of Darwinism.

In the domain of criticism also, Goethe was a successful worker ; upon this aspect of his many-sided activity, I must not, however, enter ; other men of genius moreover, notably our English poet, Coleridge, have combined, with the inspiration of the poet, the penetrative insight and clear judgment of the critic.

To the author of "Faust" belongs, I believe, the unique glory of having been, at the same time, great as a poet, and eminent as a critic and a scientist ; in the former character he takes rank with the immortals ; while, in the latter, he not only played a considerable part in the intellectual activity of his own age, but also gave a decided bias to the direction of modern scientific thought.

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER.

1759—1805.

SCHILLER, great alike as a poet and as a man, forms a worthy pendant to Goethe, nor, in the annals of literary friendships, is there one invested with deeper interest than that of these brotherly rivals, the two foremost poets of Germany.

While in some respects antagonistic in their natures, they found a strong bond of fellowship in their recognition of literature as a powerful social regenerator, tending to raise men's minds above low-thoughted care, and mere selfish interests, into a higher and purer atmosphere. Accordingly, regarded under its nobler aspects, as the vehicle of the highest truth, philosophical, spiritual, and moral, literature, by these two great poets, was embraced as a sacred mission, demanding the consecration of their lives. In this common field, each stimulated by the enthusiasm of his friend, and taking

the keenest delight in each other's productions, they laboured with indefatigable zeal, and thus, while exerting a world-wide influence, they, at the same time, prepared the way for the realization of German unity, of which they may be regarded as the harbingers.

Drawing his inspiration from nature and humanity, Goethe, in the mirror of his genius, reflected impartially their complex and manifold phenomena; hence his creations, embracing a wide range of character, are in harmony with the universal truth of things, and reproduce, with equal fidelity, the noble and the ignoble, the evil and the good.

Schiller, on the other hand, was haunted by certain grand moral ideals, which kindled within him the loftiest enthusiasm; "noble men and noble deeds," it has been said, "were the food which nourished his great soul," and these, passing through the alembic of his genius, furnished the materials for his dramatic creations.

It must, however, be confessed, even by Schiller's warmest admirers, that some of his finest characters, drawn in a great measure from his own inner consciousness, while giving utterance to the noblest sentiments in lofty and impressive language, fail to inspire that conviction of their reality which characterizes the creations of the highest dramatic genius.

Notwithstanding this drawback, as the prophet of great moral ideals, transporting the reader into a region of sublime emotion and elevated thought, he was at once taken to the heart of his contemporaries, and became a powerful factor in elevating the tone not only of Germany but of the age.

Schiller's "Robbers," the production of his early youth, like Goethe's "Goetz von Berlichingen," embodied the many-sided spirit of revolt which, as we have seen, was characteristic of the period. In the younger poet this rebellious spirit had been intensified by the stern, unrelenting officialism of which he had been the victim during his six years' residence at Stuttgart; the rigid formalism of the educational system which there pre-

veiled, which, with its inflexible regulations, allowed no scope for the exercise of individual proclivities, was peculiarly galling to his ardent and impetuous nature. The intensity of passion and of will embodied in the hero of "The Robbers," the reflex of the poet's vehement and long suppressed exasperation, accounts for the unbounded popularity of the drama, which was forthwith translated into almost every European language, and which, notwithstanding its extravagance and other grievous defects, consequent upon the poet's youth and inexperience, not unworthily ushered in the long roll of dramatic master-works with which he has enriched the literature of Germany. His "Don Carlos," his first drama written in blank verse, and published three years after "The Robbers," though not free from the blemishes which mar his earlier work, is, nevertheless, a truly noble tragedy, and its truthful delineation of the Spanish Court, at the time of Philip II., gave promise of greater excellence in the future.

For a time, however, forsaking the service of the Muse, he devoted himself to a wide range of study, including not only history, but also the philosophy of Kant, who, while circumscribing the action of the Pure Reason within the limits of experience, proclaimed, at the same time, the supremacy of the moral law, revealed intuitionally, or, as he expressed it, by the practical Reason, and upon allegiance to which men's highest welfare depends. Schiller became the devoted disciple of the Königsberg philosopher, and the zealous exponent of his ethical doctrines.

As the result of his studies, he produced his "Revolt of the Netherlands" and his "History of the Thirty Years' War," two noteworthy productions. Poetry was, however, his master-passion, and accordingly, after an interval of five years, he once more donned his poet's robe, and having selected from the "Thirty Years' War" a noble subject, upon which to concentrate his powers, he produced his "Wallenstein," a drama in three parts, which may justly be regarded as his master-work,

and the success of which, when produced upon the Weimar stage, was, Goethe tells us, unparalleled.

Through Coleridge's admirable translation, which has all the freshness of an original work, this noble tragedy has been, as it were, reborn, and occupies a unique place in our literature; hence, all lovers of poetry are familiar with the grand and imposing figure of Wallenstein himself, and with the tragic story of Max Piccolomini and Thekla, whose gracious figures, surrounded by the tumult and the horrors of war, are invested with a halo of touching and ethereal beauty.

How fully Goethe recognized the value of Coleridge's translation, appears from the following passages from a letter addressed to Carlyle, which contains also some interesting remarks upon the functions of the translator.

"The translation of 'Wallenstein' made quite a peculiar impression upon me."¹ After dwelling upon his intimate acquaintance with the drama, and upon the trouble and vexation which he had encountered in his efforts to put it on the stage, a tedious process, which had at length not unnaturally awakened within him a feeling of repugnance for what he characterizes as "this glorious piece," he proceeds as follows: "For twenty years I have neither seen nor read it. But now that, quite unexpectedly, I see it again in the language of Shakespeare, it suddenly appears before me in all its details, and I delight in it as of yore, but also in a new and peculiar way . . . This suggests to me a new observation, perchance hardly realized, and probably never uttered before—namely, that the translator does not work for his own nation only, but also for the nation from whose language he has transferred the work."

The drama concludes with the death of Wallenstein, which, to quote the words of Carlyle, "is perhaps the most highly wrought scene of the play." "Except in 'Macbeth' or the conclusion of 'Othello,' we know not where to match it. Schiller's genius is of a kind much narrower than Shakespeare's; but in his own peculiar

¹ "Goethe and Carlyle." Prof. Max Müller.

province the exciting of lofty, strong emotion, he admits of no superior."

In "*Mary Stuart*," Schiller's next drama, published in 1800, the character of the Scottish Queen is invested with great pathos and dignity; it contains, moreover, many striking scenes and passages of rare poetic beauty; nevertheless, as an historical study, it is inferior to its predecessors, "*Don Carlos*" and "*Wallenstein*;" more especially is this want of fidelity to historic truth felt in his delineation of the English court, and his portraiture of the English Queen.

The same objection may be urged against the poet's next dramatic production, his "*Maid of Orleans*," published in 1801, wherein "the introduction of supernatural agency, and the final aberration from the truth of history, have been considerably censured by German critics." These blemishes are, however, overpowered by the grandeur, the heroism, the lofty enthusiasm, where-with he has invested the warrior-shepherdess, who, though not historically, is nevertheless psychologically, true, and who will ever remain one of the poet's finest ideal creations.

Special interest attaches to "*William Tell*," as Schiller's last masterpiece, having been published in 1804, the year before his death. "In this drama," to quote the words of Carlyle, "Alpine life, in all its length and breadth, is placed before us; we stand as if in presence of the Swiss, beholding the achievement of their freedom in its minutest circumstances, with all its simplicity and unaffected greatness. The light of the poet's genius is upon the Four Forest Cantons, at the opening of the fourteenth century. The whole time and scene shine as with the brightness, the truth, and more than the beauty of reality."

At a time, moreover, when the liberties, not only of Switzerland, but of other European countries were threatened by the aggressive attitude of France, the appearance of this spirit-stirring drama was peculiarly opportune; as, with the voice of a trumpet, it summoned

the nations following the example of the Swiss, to unfurl the banner of Freedom and to defend their threatened nationalities.

Schiller's poetical genius, like Goethe's, found expression, not only in his dramas, but also in numerous lyrical poems and ballads, many of the latter, such as "The Bell," "Cassandra," "The Cranes of Ibycus," and many others, being of the highest excellence.

Among these beautiful poems I must not linger, but, in conclusion, will quote from Carlyle's "Life of Schiller," the following tribute to the great German bard: "Poetry in Schiller was, what true poetry is always; the quint-essence of general mental riches, the purified result of strong thought and conception, and of refined as well as powerful emotion. His was a mighty spirit unheedful of its might. He walked the earth in calm power; 'the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam;' but he wielded it like a wand."

ENGLAND.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

1801—1861.

WHEN the poets of the new era, inaugurated by the French Revolution, had passed away, or had ceased to sing, and when, with the battle of Waterloo, the Napoleonic wars, which had converted Europe into one vast battle-field, had been brought to a close, a period of reaction followed; weary of the prolonged struggle which had so sorely taxed her strength, England's one desire was for repose. Accordingly, repressing all humanitarian dreams of social amelioration, she devoted her energies to practical objects, more especially to the promotion of her material prosperity, an attitude of the public mind unfavourable to the production of the highest poetry, of which, for a considerable period, there was an absolute dearth.

At length, however, early in the fourth decade of the century there appeared, almost simultaneously, three first-class poets, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Elizabeth Barrett, subsequently known as Elizabeth Barrett Browning. As it is not my intention to discuss the works of living poets, except, in conclusion, to devote a brief space to our great patriarch of song, Alfred Tennyson, with whom I shall associate Robert Browning whose lamented death is so comparatively recent, that we can as yet hardly think of him as among the departed, I pass on to consider, very inadequately, the works of

our great English poetess of the nineteenth century, of whom we may be justly proud.

If ever there was a poetess born to the purple, that honour must be assigned to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "the princess of poets," as she is styled by George MacDonald, "in idea she is noble, in phrase magnificent," and whose career strikingly illustrates the truth of the poet's words; "the child is father of the man."

In "Aurora Leigh," she has given us occasional glimpses of her own childhood and girlhood, which were spent at Hope End, a charming residence in the neighbourhood of the Malvern Hills, where, at a very early age, as she herself tells us, "she dreamed of being a poet;" and where, under the tuition of the well-known Greek scholar, Hugh Stuart Boyd, she acquired a thorough knowledge of the Greek language and literature. Thus, while gratifying her intense love of study, she was laying, broad and deep, the foundations of her future life-work.

A volume of poems published anonymously in 1826 was followed by her translation of the "Prometheus Bound" of Æschylus, and other poems, in 1835. With the publication of her third volume in 1838, containing "Isabel's Child," "The Deserted Garden," "Cowper's Grave," and other poems, dear to all lovers of her poetry, her position among the poets of England was assured. Her fourth volume appeared in 1844, and when we consider that, during the intervening six years, besides carrying on a voluminous correspondence, she had contributed to the "Athenæum" a series of articles on "the Greek Christian poets," and had co-operated in several literary projects, we cannot but feel surprise at the intellectual vigour which, in addition to these various avocations, could, in so comparatively short a period, produce the series of master-works which she then gave to the world. Our surprise is increased when we remember the unfavourable conditions under which her literary labours were carried on.

An invalid since her fifteenth year, often completely prostrated by illness, her mental vigour never faltered.

On settling in London in 1841, her health revived ; though still confined to a darkened chamber, she was able to walk from her bedroom to her sitting-room. The following extract from one of her letters, gives a graphic picture of her surroundings. " I live in London, to be sure, and except for the glory of it, I might live in a desert, so profound is my solitude, and so complete my isolation from things and persons without. I lie all day, and day after day, on this sofa, and my windows do not even look into the street." In the annals of literature it would be difficult to find a more striking example of mind triumphing over adverse physical conditions.

Her new volume received from the public an enthusiastic welcome, and she was recognized, henceforward, not only as a great poetess, but also as a seer, giving impassioned utterance to vital truths.

Taking up with passionate earnestness the cause of social regeneration, which had been a source of lofty inspiration to Shelley, she followed him in carrying on the work of the Revolution. One of the crying evils, which had led to that great upheaval, had been the complete severance between the higher and the lower classes of society, and the abandonment of the latter to a state of abject misery and destitution. The same cause of social disquietude, though in a less intensified form, existed in England, where the wealthier classes, instead of endeavouring by remedial measures to mitigate the evil,—dreading a catastrophe similar to that which had so recently convulsed a neighbouring state, sought rather to stifle any expressions of discontent on the part of the working classes, and to repress any efforts to ameliorate their condition.

It was against this sordid spirit, and in behalf of its most helpless victims, that Elizabeth Barrett, giving expression to her deepest convictions, sent forth her poem, entitled " The Cry of the Children," full of pathos and of passion, and of which, to quote the words of Edgar Poe, " Dante himself might have been proud."

Wonderfully pathetic is the opening stanza :

"Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
 Ere the sorrow comes with years?
 They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
 But that cannot stop their tears.
 The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
 The young birds are chirping in the nest,
 The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
 The young flowers are blowing toward the west,
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,
 They are weeping bitterly,
 They are weeping in the play-time of the others,
 In the country of the free."

How grand, in the concluding stanza, is her outburst of fiery indignation against the sordid mammon-worship which, in its cruel lust for gold, had tolerated the cruelties of which, in the preceding verses, she had given so appalling a picture!

"They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
 And their look is dread to see,
 For they mind you of their angels in high places
 With eyes turned on Deity.
 'How long' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation
 Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart;
 Stifle down, with a mailed heel, its palpitation
 And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
 Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
 And your purple shows your path!'

But the child's sob, in the silence, curses deeper
 Than the strong man in his wrath."

While listening to these words we could almost imagine that one of the grand old Hebrew prophets had risen from the dead, to denounce the national sin of England, as, in the olden time, he had denounced the idolatry and wickedness of the people of Israel.

Another violation of the great principle of human brotherhood, against which the French Revolution had uttered its scathing protest, was the homage paid to rank, and the artificial barrier which it had interposed between the different classes of society, thus tending to restrict social intercourse, and to interfere with the free play of natural affection.

The great principle of the dignity of man as man,

irrespective of wealth or station, which had inspired the celebrated ode of Robert Burns, "A man 's a man for a' that," was now to find expression in one of Elizabeth Barrett's finest poems, "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," wherein the peasant-poet, Bertram, admonishes the peeress, Lady Geraldine, to have more reverence, "not for rank and wealth,"

"But for Adam's seed, Man! Trust me, 'tis a clay above your
scorning,
With God's image stamped upon it, and God's kindling breath
within."

With reference to this poem, I am tempted once more to quote the words of Edgar Poe, who said that, with the exception of Tennyson's "Locksley Hall," he had never perused a poem containing so much of the fiercest passion, with so much of the most ethereal fancy.

Among the remaining poems in these volumes, several of which are exquisitely beautiful, I shall content myself with calling attention to the one entitled, "The Dead Pan," partly inspired, as the poetess tells us, by Schiller's "Götter Griechenlands," and partly by the tradition recorded by Plutarch, that, at the moment of Christ's death on the cross, a cry was heard, sweeping over the sea, "Great Pan is dead," and that then and for ever all the oracles of heathendom ceased.

Peculiar interest attaches to the concluding stanza of this poem, as embodying the principle enunciated by Keats in his well-known line:

"Beauty is truth, truth Beauty:"

"O brave poets, keep back nothing,
Nor mix falsehood with the whole;
Look up Godward; speak the truth in
Worthy song, from earnest soul;
Hold in high poetic duty,
Truest Truth the fairest Beauty!
Pan, Pan is dead."

In her poem entitled "A Vision of Poets," our poetess has given expression to the same sentiment in the following lines;

“These were poets true
Who died for Beauty, as martyrs do
For Truth—the ends being scarcely two.”

In 1846 a change came over the life of our poetess : by her marriage with Robert Browning she became the heroine of a beautiful romance, and exchanged the solitude of a darkened chamber for love, freedom, and the bright sunshine of Italy. To the world the event is chiefly interesting as having inspired her “Sonnets from the Portuguese,” which, with the exception of Shakespeare’s, may perhaps be regarded as the most exquisite love-poems in the English language.

After their marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Browning repaired to Italy, and took up their abode in Florence ; “To her,” says Mr. Story, “Italy was, from the first, a living fire.”

The intense affection with which she regarded the land of her adoption, together with her deep sympathy with its wrongs and aspirations, found expression in her poem entitled “Casa Guidi windows,” the earlier portion of which records the enthusiastic joy with which she hailed the Italian uprising in 1848 ; while in the second part, she gives expression to the profound dejection with which she witnessed its failure. After alluding to the mighty spirits who, in bygone times, had shed a glory over Italy, Dante, Michael Angelo, Savonarola, and many others, and after intimating that, if the rising generation are content to stand still, the great men of old will have lived in vain ; she continues,

“So rise up henceforth with a cheerful smile,
And having strewn the violets, reap the corn,
And having reaped and garnered, bring the plough,
And draw new furrows 'neath the healthy morn,
And plant the great Hereafter in the Now.”

A grand lesson applicable to every age and every clime.

“Aurora Leigh,” the poem upon which Mrs. Browning’s fame chiefly rests, is characterized by the author as “the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions of work and art have entered.”

It is to be regretted that a poem so nobly conceived should be disfigured by passages which justly expose the author to unfavourable criticism. Profoundly impressed by the terrible social evils which prevailed in England during the earlier decades of the century—the apparently impassable barriers between “the classes and the masses,” together with the ignorance, brutality, and destitution of the latter,—in her effort to portray some aspects of the period, she has, it must be confessed, overdrawn her picture, a result due, doubtless, in a great measure, to the complete seclusion in which, previous to her marriage, her life had been spent. Nevertheless, notwithstanding its manifold and grave defects, “*Aurora Leigh*” is a truly noble poem; in addition to its wonderful descriptions, and its magnificent bursts of poetry, it is invested with peculiar interest, as a remarkable example of self-portraiture. In the heroine, we have a graphic picture of the poetess, with her passionate intensity of nature, and her rapturous delight in all things beautiful and good. Haunted by visions of the ideal, which she longs to realize in song, she is possessed by an overpowering conviction of the supreme importance of poetry, as the heaven-appointed medium for uplifting the souls of men, and she consequently lives under the abiding sense of the solemn responsibility of her vocation;—yet is she a woman too, with a heart hungry for sympathy and love.

Romney Leigh, the hero of the poem, represents the one-sided philanthropist, who, appalled by the misery and destitution of the poor, devotes himself, with passionate earnestness, to the great work of ameliorating their condition, and whose cherished dream it is to bridge over the chasm existing between the poor and their more fortunate brethren.

Unfortunately, however, ignoring the great truth that “man does not live by bread alone,” he failed to see that this object can only be attained by breathing into the masses the breath of spiritual life, and so uplifting them to a higher level.

Loving his cousin, *Aurora Leigh*, he offers her his

heart and hand, hoping to find in her a fellow-worker in the cause to which he has devoted himself. She, with her artistic nature, while in secret returning his love, considers that he is already wedded to his social theory, and feeling herself not meek enough

“To be the handmaid of a lawful spouse,”

she rejects his offer. One of the underlying ideas embodied in the poem finds expression in the following words addressed by Aurora to Romney, by the poetess to the one-sided philanthropist, who had urged her to relinquish art, and to devote herself, with him, to what he regards as the nobler work of ministering to the poor :

“I, too, have my vocation,—work to do ;—
 and though your world
 Were twice as wretched as you represent,
 Most serious work, most necessary work,
 As any of the economists ;
 I hold you will not compass your poor ends
 Of barley feeding and material ease,
 Without a poet’s individualism
 To work your universal. It takes a soul
 To move a body ; it takes a high-souled man
 To move the masses, even to a cleaner sty ;
 It takes the ideal, to blow a hair’s-breadth off
 The dust of the actual. All your Fouriers failed
 Because not poets enough to understand
 That life develops from within.”

These ideal representatives of philanthropy and art, Romney and Aurora Leigh, pursuing their respective careers with the enthusiasm of devotees, confess at length that their efforts have been failures.

Whilst the philanthropist, who, ignoring men’s spiritual nature, had limited his efforts to the supply of their material needs, had himself become the victim of those whom he had laboured to befriend ; the proud, self-relying woman confesses that, by wronging her own life, she had been a traitor to the cause of art. She thus makes her confession to Romney, whose proffered heart and hand she had rejected :

“You were wrong
In much? you said so. I was wrong in most.
Oh, most! You only thought to rescue men
By half means, half-way, seeing half their wants,
While thinking nothing of your personal gain.
But I who saw the human nature broad,
At both sides, comprehending, too, the soul's,
And all the high necessities of Art,
Betrayed the thing I saw, and wronged my own life
For which I pleaded. Passioned to exalt
The artist's instinct in me at the cost
Of putting down the woman's,—I forgot
No perfect artist is developed here
From an imperfect woman. Flower from root,
And spiritual from natural, grade by grade,
Is all our life.
Art is much, but love is more!
O art, my art, thou 'rt much, but love is more!
Art symbolizes heaven, but Love is God
And makes heaven.”

In “Aurora Leigh,” the greatest work of our poetess, we again recognize the voice of the prophet. Since its publication an important step has been taken in the right direction, and could she return to life, she would sympathize with the earnest efforts which are now being made in various directions to bring science, literature, and art, and other refining influences, home to the hearts and minds of the people. She would, moreover, rejoice to recognize that, as in the case of her earlier poem, “The Cry of the Children,” her own earnest and impassioned words had been instrumental in bringing about the desired result.

In bidding farewell to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, we rejoice to see her take her place in that “strange company” of whom she herself has sung,

“God's prophets of the beautiful,”

whose deathless music, sounding from age to age, accelerates the progress of Humanity on its onward march.

FRANCE.

VICTOR HUGO.

1803—1885.

IN England, the liberation of poetry from the conventional trammels of the so-called classical school had been, as we have seen, a gradual process, which, commencing about the middle of the eighteenth century, had culminated with Wordsworth and his contemporaries.

In Germany, the work of literary emancipation, originating with Lessing, had been consummated by Goethe and Schiller.

In France, in spite of the Revolution, which, with its tremendous upheaval, had shattered the social and political fabric, the pseudo-classicalism of the *ancien régime*, with its artificial diction, its enforcement of the unities, together with its adherence to antiquated forms, had survived the Empire, and after the Restoration still held possession of the stage.

In explanation of this remarkable phenomenon, it must be remembered that the great traditions of French literature, reaching back to the era of the "Grand Monarch," had been perpetuated by the Académie Française, a conservative institution, wielding vast influence, and decidedly hostile to literary innovators; while the intermediate literature, embodying the critical and philosophical spirit of the eighteenth century, had adopted the forms inherited from the past.

At length, however, this artificial system, to which its adherents clung with passionate tenacity, could no longer

hold its ground against the spirit of the age, which, rebelling against the conventional pedantry and scholastic tyranny which threatened to stifle all original genius, found in Victor Hugo one of its most striking impersonations.

Recognizing it as his mission to realize in literature the revolution which, in the political and social spheres, had been accomplished in the previous century, and adopting as his motto, "*à peuple nouveau, art nouveau,*" he rallied around him his youthful contemporaries, and with them consummated that return to nature and reality which, originating with Rousseau and carried forward by Chateaubriand and other writers, forms the distinctive characteristic of the Romantic School.

It was upon the stage that, under Hugo's leadership, the liberation battle of French literature was to be fought out, and, among his dramas, peculiar interest attaches to "*Hernani*," the success of which in 1830, secured the ultimate triumph of the Romantic School. Very lofty was Hugo's ideal of the drama, as at once a "*rostrum*" and "*a philosopher's chair*," from which to proclaim the profoundest truths, moral and spiritual. He aimed, moreover, at exhibiting upon the stage some aspects of life and human nature, which, under the *ancien régime*, had been practically ignored, but which, under the new order of things, could no longer be overlooked.

Accordingly, with characteristic fervour, he endeavoured to set forth the diviner elements inherent in the hearts of even the most degraded outcasts, together with the struggle between these higher instincts and the baser tendencies with which they are too frequently associated.

It is this struggle which imparts to the character of "*Triboulet*" in "*Le roi s'amuse*," and to other of Hugo's dramatic creations, male and female, their deep and tragic interest.

Among his dramas the palm is, by some critics, awarded to "*Marion de Lorme*," while "*Ruy Blas*," for its admirably constructed plot, its romantic situations,

and the novelty and variety of its characters, is by others regarded as his dramatic master-work.

The remaining dramas of Hugo, while bearing the indisputable stamp of the author's genius, bear witness also, in a greater or less degree, to the serious blemishes to which even his warmest admirers cannot be altogether blind. These blemishes may possibly be in some measure attributed to his mental attitude, as a revolutionary leader in the new literary movement, and to the tremendous excitement attending its inauguration; exulting in victory, and in his newly acquired freedom, and rejoicing in the exercise of his Titanic strength, he too often bids defiance, not only to the conventional restraints so recently overthrown, but also to the canons of literary taste founded upon truth and nature. Hence a certain recklessness and exaggeration, together with a want of balance and proportion, by which the splendour and beauty of his poems are too often disfigured;—defects which, though fostered by circumstances, including his lack of adequate mental discipline, consequent upon his desultory education, doubtless had their root in the limitless character of his genius and of his emotional nature, as portrayed by himself in the following striking lines:

“ Bonté, fureur, c'est là mon flux et mon reflux,
Et je ne suis borné d'aucun côté, non plus
Quand ma bouche sourit que lorsque ma voix gronde;
Je me sens plein d'une âme étoilée et profonde;
Mon cœur est sans frontière, et je n'ai pas d'endroit
Où finisse l'amour des petits, et le droit
Des faibles, et l'appui qu'on doit aux misérables;
Si c'est un mal, il faut me mettre aux Incurables.”¹

This picture, drawn from life, reveals also the tender-heartedness of the poet, whose loving sympathy embraced, not only his fellow mortals, but also his humbler fellow-creatures, whose sufferings awakened within him the profoundest pity. In this intense sympathy with sorrow and suffering, essentially characteristic of his genius, he

¹ “ L'art d'être grand père.”

bears a striking resemblance to Shelley. Like Shelley, also, believing in the prospective amelioration of man's condition, he indulges in fondly cherished dreams of the future social regeneration of humanity.

Accordingly, in many of his poems, he pictures the realization of his ideal when, with the universal recognition of human brotherhood, wars and enmities shall cease, love shall triumph over hate, and when the Angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest, Peace on earth and goodwill to man," shall be literally fulfilled.

Unlike Shelley, however, not content to be a mere poetical dreamer, Hugo aspired to take an active part in the politics of his country, and became a conspicuous figure in the successive stages of its history.

Moreover, while commencing his literary career as a lyrical poet, he was also a dramatist, historian, and novelist, and it is perhaps in his wonderful romances that his genius has found its highest embodiment.

Strongly impressed with the dignity of human nature, and with its inherent nobleness, humanity, as delineated by him, is seldom mean and contemptible, with the exception, indeed, of his portrait of Napoleon le Petit, in "*Les Châtiments*." Characters, revolting under many aspects, are not unfrequently represented as, on some sudden emergency, exhibiting noble and redeeming qualities, which awaken our sympathy and interest; while, among his ideal creations, there are figures cast in a mould so truly heroic that, through sympathy with them, the reader is lifted to a higher level, and feels that lofty enthusiasm for virtue, to awaken which is one of the noblest functions of art.

Another striking characteristic of Hugo's genius, is his intense sympathy with Nature, together with his power of delineating, with unrivalled skill, her innumerable aspects;—the mystery, the sublimity, the remorseless fury of the ocean-waves, together with the vague terrors which haunt the impenetrable forest;—this wonderful gift finds ample expression in his romances, and adds immensely to their charm.

It is, however, with his poetry alone that we are at present concerned, and in this department of literature he was so wonderfully prolific, that any analysis of his voluminous productions would here be out of place. I must accordingly content myself with calling attention to a few of his poetical master-works.

Being essentially auto-biographical, reflecting the successive phases of his inner life, his poems, like his political career, may be divided into two distinct periods. The "*Odes et Ballades*," first published in 1822, and subsequently in an enlarged form in 1828, while bearing witness to the versatility of his genius, the wide range of his sympathy, and his wonderful mastery over rhyme, are pervaded by the sentiments inherited from his mother, of loyalty to the throne and devotion to the Catholic Church, as evinced by such poems as "*Les Funérailles de Louis XVIII.*," "*Le Sacre de Charles X.*," "*Louis XVII.*," and others.

Indications, more or less distinct, of the coming inward revolution, which was to convert the catholic royalist into the anti-catholic republican, may be discerned in the succeeding volumes of his earlier period;—"*Les Orientales*," with their splendour of colour and rich harmonies of sound; "*Les Feuilles d'Automne*," replete with tender memories of childhood and of home; "*Les Chants de Crépuscule*," reflecting a season of inward hesitation and incertitude; "*Les voix intérieures*," and "*Les Rayons et les Ombres*," revealing the poet's ascent to a higher level of religious faith;—all these volumes, which contain poems of great and varied beauty, reflect also the successive phases of his inner life, religious, social, and political, during the transitional period, before his final emancipation from the convictions and tendencies inherited from the past.

For a considerable period after the close of Hugo's career as a dramatist in 1843, his Muse was unproductive, with the exception of the poems, subsequently published in "*Les Contemplations*," till, at length, the catastrophe of December 2nd, 1852, rekindling the fire of

his genius, he gave birth to "Les Châtiments." In this terrible volume, which may be regarded as inaugurating the second period alike of his literary and his political career, the poet appears under a new aspect, as the impassioned champion of democracy, and the fierce denouncer of what he regarded as a flagrant political crime.

Possessed by an intense love of freedom and hatred of restraint, while pouring the viols of his wrath upon the author of the coup d'état and his accomplices, he hurls his scathing words against every form of tyranny and wrong. In a striking poem, entitled "Lazarus," he calls upon the people to rise, as it were, from the dead, and to reassert the liberty of which they had been unjustly deprived; while in the Epilogue, the exiled poet gives expression to his absolute trust in the moral government of a Righteous God. To some of his fellow exiles, whose faith was beginning to waver, he addressed the following lines:

"D'ailleurs, pensons. Nos jours sont des jours d'amertume,
Mais, quand nous étendons les bras dans cette brume
Nous sentons un main :
Quand nous marchons, courbés, dans l'ombre du martyre,
Nous entendons quelqu'un derrière nous nous dire :
C'est ici le chemin.

"O proscrits, l'avenir est aux peuples ! Paix, gloire,
Liberté, reviendront sur des chars de victoire.
Aux foudroyants essieux ;
Ce crime qui triomphe est fumée et mensonge ;
Voilà ce que je puis affirmer, moi qui songe
L'œil fixé sur les cieux !"

His unswerving conviction that, how dark soever might be the immediate outlook, right would eventually triumph over wrong, recalls the unwavering faith in the great realities of the unseen world, which characterized the old Hebrew prophets.

"*Les Châtiments*" it has been truly said, "is not simply a satire. It is more than that, it is a song of consolation for the exiled; a requiem for the fallen

brave of the Republic ; a monument—a brazen tablet of history to face the corruption of men and morals ; a prophetic chant and a cry of defiance ! ”

In 1856, three years after “ *Les Châtiments*,” appeared “ *Les Contemplations*,” which, as the poet informs us, embody five and twenty years of his life. “ *L’auteur a laissé, pour ainsi dire, le livre faire en lui. La vie en filtrant goutte à goutte à travers les événements, et les souffrances, l’a déposé dans son cœur . . . C’est ce qu’on pourrait appeler, si le mot n’avait quelque prétention, les Mémoires d’une âme.* ”

The most touching poems in this collection, contained in the fourth book, are in memory of his beloved daughter who, with her young husband, was drowned six months after their marriage in 1843. The poems in this series are very beautiful, giving expression to the various phases of human grief, in presence of life’s inevitable tragedy, the death of those we love, ranging from the bitter cry of anguish to the more chastened emotion of sorrowful regret.

Upon this interesting record of a poet’s soul, I must not linger ; nevertheless, as illustrating what appears to me to be the most original feature of Hugo’s genius, I shall subsequently return to it.

According to Victor Hugo’s most ardent admirers, his great work “ *La Légende des Siècles*,” entitles him to take rank among the epic poets of the world ; a claim which, having regard only to its colossal size, and to the grandeur of the poet’s aim, as set forth in the preface to the first part, might seem to be justified. According to the author, the minor poems, “ *les petites épopées*,” which compose this gigantic work, are successive casts of the human profile from Eve, the mother of men, down to the later decades of the nineteenth and prospectively to the twentieth century.

Any elaborate criticism of this colossal work, even were I competent to undertake the task, would here be out of place ; I must therefore content myself with giving expression to my genuine admiration for many of the

minor poems of this vast "epopée," which for its full appreciation must be studied as a whole.

I now pass on to consider this many-sided genius under a very different aspect, as the poet of childhood and babyhood, a domain wherein he is without a rival; we have, it is true, Prince Arthur, one of Shakespeare's loveliest creations, we have also Blake's "Songs of Innocence," Wordsworth's apostrophe to a new-born babe, in his celebrated Ode, and Swinburne's exquisite roundelays; nevertheless, the blended sentiments of reverence and wonder, together with the gracious tenderness, intense admiration and depth of affection, awakened in Hugo by the presence of little children, are quite unique, and constitute one of his prime claims to our gratitude and love.

Many beautiful pictures of child-life may be found scattered through his prose works, notably that in "Quatre-vingt-treize," of the three little children, the youngest only twenty months old, in the library of the old castle of La Fourge, whose playful gambols and innocent prattle are drawn with a master's hand, and whose rescue forms one of the most touching episodes of that wonderful romance. Striking indeed is the contrast between the unconscious sleep of the little ones in the blazing tower, and the fierce anguish of the mother, who sees them from without, and who yearns with frenzied passion to deliver them from their impending doom. Very touching also is the figure of Cosette, the poor neglected child in "Les Misérables," who is so tenderly fostered by Valjean.

It is, however, through the voice of song that the varied emotions, awakened in the poet's large and loving heart, by the contemplation of childhood, find their fullest expression.

His supremacy in this direction might indeed have been anticipated at an early period of his career, from several charming poems which appeared in his earlier volumes, for example, "A les Oiseaux envolés," in "Les voix intérieures;" and his exquisite little poem in "Les

Feuilles d'Automne," entitled "*Lorsque l'enfant paraît*," which I am inclined to regard as one of his lyrical masterpieces.

Very touching also are many of the poems in the fourth book of "*Les Contemplations*," devoted to the memory of his beloved daughter, whose early death cast so dark a shadow over his life. From these tender reminiscences, I select the following picture of her infancy.

"Elle avait pris ce pli dans son age enfantin
De venir dans ma chambre un peu chaque matin ;
Je l'attendais ainsi qu'un rayon qu'on espère ;
Elle entra et disait : ' Bonjour, mon petit père ;'
Prenait ma plume, ouvrait mes livres, s'asseyait
Sur mon lit, derangeait mes papiers, et riait,
Puis soudain s'en allait comme un oiseau qui passe.
Alors, je reprenais, la tête un peu moins lasse,
Mon œuvre interrompue, et, tout en écrivant,
Parmi mes manuscrits je rencontrais souvent
Quelque arabesque folle et qu'elle avait tracée,
Et maintes pages blanches entre ses mains froissées,
Où, je ne sais comment, venaient mes plus doux vers.
Elle aimait Dieu, les fleurs, les astres, les près verts,
Et c'était un esprit avant d'être une femme.
Son regard reflétait le clarté de son âme.

C'était ma fée,

Et le doux astre de mes yeux."

It is, however, in one of his later works, "*L'art d'être grand père*," that his worship of childhood and babyhood finds its most perfect embodiment. There is something inexpressibly touching in the aspect of the venerable poet, after the wreck of his fondly cherished hopes for his beloved country, after the terrible calamity which had overshadowed his home, a proscrip and an exile—finding solace in the sweet companionship of his almost infant grandchildren, George and La Petite Jeanne, whom he has immortalized in song.

Among the numerous charming poems in the volume, I am tempted to select for special notice the following : "*Jeanne fait son entré* ;" "*L'autre* ;" "*La mise en liberté* ;" the three poems entitled "*Jeanne Endormie*"

and "Georges et Jeanne;" which contains the following delightful description of their infantine prattle.

"Ce n'est pas la parole, ô ciel bleu, c'est la verbe;
C'est la langue infinie, innocente et superbe,
Que soupirent les vents, les forêts et les flots:

.
Ces mots mystérieux que Jeanne dit à George,
C'est l'idylle du cygne avec le rouge-gorge,
Ce sont les questions que les abeilles font,
Et que le lys naïf pose au moineau profond.

.
O Jeanne! Georges! Voix dont j'ai le cœur saisi!
Si les astres chantaient ils bégaieraient ainsi."

Regret has been expressed that the prevailing quietude pervading the sanctuary dedicated to La petite Jeanne and Georges, seldom broken except by the sweet voices and the joyous laughter of the little ones, should occasionally be disturbed by harsh and discordant notes, as when the poet's intense hatred of priestly bigotry and intolerance finds expression in such poems as "L'immaculée conception," "Le Syllabus," and "A propos de la loi dite liberté de l'enseignement," etc.

It must, nevertheless, be confessed that these poems contain passages of great beauty, and eminently characteristic of the author. As illustrating this remark, I am tempted to quote the following stanzas from "Le Syllabus:"

"Les prêtres vont criant: Anathème! Anathème!
Mais la nature dit de toutes parts: Je t'aime!
Venez enfants; le jour
Est partout, et partout on voit la joie éclore;
Et l'infini n'a pas plus d'azur et d'aurore
Que l'âme n'a d'amour.

"J'ai fait la grosse voix contre ces noirs pygmées;
Mais ne me craignez pas; les fleurs sont embaumées,
Les bois sont triomphants;
Le printemps est la fête immense, et nous en sommes;
Venez, j'ai quelquefois fait peur aux petits hommes,
Non aux petits enfants."

In his passionate denunciations of tyranny and oppression, under all their forms; in his recognition of the inherent dignity of human nature, together with the sacredness of its primal affections; and in his anticipation of a higher social ideal, based upon truth, justice, faith, and love,—a true kingdom of heaven upon earth, as humanity's final goal, Victor Hugo must be regarded, in conjunction with other poet-seers, as an important factor in carrying on the great work of social amelioration.

To him, moreover, belongs the honour of being the first poet to experience the deep sense of mystery which broods over childhood, apart from Wordsworth's theory of its anti-natal dreams, and the poems in which he gives such felicitous expression to the various emotions awakened by its subtle and ineffable charm, appear to me to be his unique and most original contribution to the poetry of the nineteenth century.

ENGLAND.

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH. 1819—1861.

MATTHEW ARNOLD. 1822—1888.

It is interesting to compare, under some of their more salient features, the epoch of the French Revolution and the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the later decades of the latter, and to note their points of analogy and contrast.

We have seen how the intense sympathy which greeted the Revolution, with its enthusiasm of Humanity and its passion for liberty, was succeeded by a prolonged period of reaction, and how, eventually, its underlying principles, especially that of universal brotherhood, were proclaimed anew, first by Shelley and subsequently by Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The passing of the Reform Bill in 1832 may be regarded as inaugurating in England that bloodless revolution of which Shelley had been the evangelist, and which, by successive extensions of the suffrage, has culminated in placing supreme power in the hands of the people; thus realizing the prophecy of Lord Byron, that the people would eventually triumph; fortunately, however, without the blood and tears which, in accordance with his prediction, were to accompany that result.

Simultaneously with the extension of political power to the millions, efforts have been made to meet their requirements, moral and intellectual, as well as physical, and thus to realize those aspirations after social regeneration which had their birth with the Revolution. Accordingly, one of the most striking features of the

latter half of the nineteenth century is the spirit of practical philanthropy, which has called into the field an army of workers, striving to remove all obstacles to social progress; to raise the masses to a higher level; to introduce a state of society which shall secure to all its members the rights inherent to our common humanity, and who, by their example, are enforcing the great principle that "the highest political watchword is not Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, nor yet Solidarity, but Service."

The higher education of women, the wider spheres of usefulness open to them, and the important part taken by them in the great work of social amelioration, are all features of the age in harmony with the fervent aspirations of which, early in the century, Shelley had been the mouthpiece. With what joy would he have listened to the words in which our great living bard has given expression to the principle, the recognition of which he had himself with fervid eloquence proclaimed, as an essential condition of man's highest well-being.

"The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink
Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free."

To carry social Reform into the arena of politics, and to endeavour, through the medium of legislation, to realize the vision of a regenerated society which fired men's minds at the outbreak of the Revolution is in some quarters regarded as the great problem of the present day. Accordingly, when viewed under their social and political aspects, a certain continuity may be traced between the Revolutionary epoch and the later decades of the nineteenth century. Striking, however, is the contrast when viewed under their intellectual and spiritual aspects. In England, the Revolutionary spirit, during its earlier manifestations, had been directed almost exclusively against social and political grievances, leaving unassailed the religious belief of the age as embodied in the popular theology.

A certain amount of scepticism had, it is true, prevailed in the eighteenth century; it had, however, been

confined within comparatively narrow limits, and had not in England, as on the continent, exerted any powerful or widespread influence. Shocked, moreover, at the flagrant irreligion professed by the leaders of the Revolution in France, to which its horrors were in a great measure attributed, the English people, sternly repressing all sceptical tendencies at home, clung all the more tenaciously to their traditional beliefs and time-honoured institutions. At that time, Christianity, grounded, as was supposed, upon an infallible Bible,—a foundation which, it was believed, could never be shaken,—was regarded as occupying an impregnable position, while Scepticism, branded as Infidelity, was condemned as high treason against the Author of revelation.

Striking indeed is the contrast between this unquestioning faith in religious dogmas, and that spirit of searching investigation, of impatience with established formulas, of rebellion against authority in matters of religion, which has manifested itself during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Among the causes which may be assigned for the development of these sceptical tendencies, probably one of the most powerful has been the revolt of the moral sense against certain doctrines of the popular theology, notably that of everlasting perdition, with its eternity of fruitless torture; a dogma felt to be inconsistent with the divine attributes of justice and beneficence.

The study of comparative religions, together with the results of modern criticism, have, moreover, tended to invalidate the infallibility of the Bible, which, after the Reformation, had, in Protestant communities, superseded the infallibility and authority of the Church.

The stupendous discoveries of modern science, revealing areas of time and space appalling to the imagination, have also been influential in disturbing religious convictions, based upon theories of the universe and of human history which are now exploded; while the permanent and unvarying order pervading the vast realms of Nature

has thrown discredit upon the popular conception of miracle, as a violation of universal law.

Many of the old foundations of the religious life having been thus undermined, it is not surprising that many earnest seekers after Truth, feeling themselves compelled to relinquish their belief in an authoritative Revelation, yet unwilling to resign their religious convictions, should have passionately yearned for some firmer basis upon which to rest their belief in the great spiritual realities of the unseen world.

As the poetical representative of these speculative and questioning Truth-seekers, we may take Arthur Hugh Clough, a few particulars respecting whose life will give additional interest to his poems, as revealing the character of their author, and the circumstances under which they were written. Born in 1819, on leaving a preparatory school, he was removed to Rugby, where he became one of Dr. Arnold's most distinguished pupils.

Having gained the Balliol Scholarship, he went into residence at Oxford when the University was stirred to its depths by the great Tractarian movement, headed by Dr. Newman, who, with his coadjutors, had, in one direction, succeeded in awakening England from the religious apathy, or rather atrophy, into which she had fallen during the earlier decades of the century.

"For a time Clough was carried away in the direction of the new opinions; yet in his mind the disturbance was but temporary. His own nature before long re-asserted itself;—still, when the torrent had subsided, he found that, not only had it swept away the new views which had been presented to him by the leaders of the Romanizing movement, but also that it had shaken the whole foundations of his early faith, and had forced him to rely upon his own endeavours in search after that truth which he still firmly believed in." It is this spirit of honest doubt, the struggle to harmonize ideas and emotions apparently antagonistic, the passionate search for truth, the undying aspiration after a clearer vision of heavenly things, which impart to the poetry of Clough,

as the typical representative of one aspect of the age, their deep interest and pathos.

Having lost faith alike in his older and his newer creed, he had, from his mental constitution, peculiar difficulty in forming for himself any satisfactory conception of the great invisible realities,—a state of mind which is strikingly reflected in the poem entitled, *ὕμνος ἄνυμνος*.

Elected fellow of Oriel in 1842, he continued to reside at Oxford till 1848, and it was during this period that most of the poems in the little volume called "*Ambarvalia*" were written; among these and his other minor poems, I would call particular attention to the following: "*Qua cursum ventus*," "*The New Sinai*," "*Qui Laborat Orat*," "*The Hidden Love*," "*O Thou of Little Faith*," "*Easter-day, Naples*," "*Easter-day, II*."

At length, however, feeling himself out of harmony with the tone of the University, he resigned his fellowship, and went forth to seek elsewhere a more unfettered career. It was under these circumstances that he wrote, in hexameters, his "*Long Vacation Pastoral*," "*The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuoloch*," distinguished alike by its powerful characterization and by its graphic delineations of Nature, revealing the loving admiration with which, under her varied aspects, she had been studied by the poet. While, through the character of the hero, Philip Hewson, the radical, revealing the political proclivities of the author, this vigorous poem contains no allusion to the religious perplexities which had already found expression in some of his most beautiful lyrics.

Having accepted the headship of University Hall, London, before entering upon the duties of his office, he travelled to Italy, where his sojourn at Rome coincided with the siege of the city by the French, several episodes of that event being recorded in the poem which he then composed, entitled "*Amours de Voyage*."

As the "*Alastor*" of Shelley has been characterized as portraying "the Nemesis of solitary souls," so the theme of this poem may justly be characterized as the

Nemesis of over-speculative souls. It would almost seem as if it had been the poet's intention to exhibit the tendency inherent in the over-indulgence of the speculative faculty, to generate that infirmity of purpose and of will, that morbid shrinking from any decided course of action from which he had himself been saved by the unusual strength of his moral intuitions.

Accordingly, in this poem we have a picture of the paralysis of the higher nature, caused by an over-speculative tendency, leaving nothing but what the hero himself characterizes as :

"This vile hungering impulse, this demon within us of craving,"

and which prompts his final resolve, so strikingly characteristic of a restless, over-speculative age.

"Let us seek knowledge;—the rest may come and go as it happens;

Knowledge is painful often; and yet when we know, we are happy;

Seek it, and leave mere Faith and Love to come with the chances."

In 1850, during a hasty visit to Venice, he composed his third long poem, "Dipsycus;" if a tone of sadness pervades the "Amours de Voyage," the tragedy deepens in "Dipsycus," wherein we see portrayed the collapse of the moral nature when it is undermined by doubt, and not supported by any confident belief in spiritual realities. The author tells us that what he attempts to represent is the conflict between the tender conscience and the world, the latter being represented by the spirit, following Dipsycus like his shadow, and beneath whose withering sneer all the higher emotions of the human heart are blighted. From the very commencement the keynote of the poem is sounded. Dipsycus tells how, in passing through "the great, wicked streets of Naples," in the previous year, he had felt, "Christ is not risen," and how, as in Naples then, so now at Venice, he thinks, "Christ is not risen either." Allusion is here made to the author's deeply interesting poem entitled

"Easter-day, Naples." The Spirit, like a second Mephistopheles, being ever at hand with his ironical and sarcastic remarks, Dipsycus exclaims :

"What is this persecuting voice that haunts me?
What? Whence? Of whom? How am I to detect?
Myself or not myself? My own bad thoughts,
Or some external agency at work,
To lead me who knows whither?"

It is another version of "The Two Voices," where Dipsycus, instead of listening to the higher, chooses rather "to commune with the barren voice."

We are led on from scene to scene, wherein Dipsycus gives us, from time to time, glimpses of his higher intuitions; his intense love of the beautiful, his magnanimity, which would choose to accept rather than to inflict wrong; his sympathy with his suffering fellow-mortals; his yearning for a clearer vision of heavenly things; such sentiments and aspirations invariably calling forth the ridicule and sarcasm of his cynical attendant. We need not follow in detail the history of his fall; or relate how, at times, calling to his aid high and virtuous thoughts, he summons courage to resist the tempter;—thus the poem which, somewhat amplified, appears among Clough's poems as "The Hidden Love," is here introduced in a colloquy with the worldly fiend. The beginning of the end follows when, like Faust, Dipsycus resolves to parley with the enemy, and eventually to come to terms with him.

Even after his apparently final surrender to the evil one, he has not altogether succeeded in silencing his higher intuitions, which find expression in the following scene :

Scene VII.—At Torcello.—Dipsycus alone.

"I had a vision; was it in my sleep?
And if it were what then? But sleep or wake,
I saw a great light open o'er my head;
And sleep or wake, uplifted to that light,
Out of that light proceeding, heard a voice
Uttering high words, which, whether sleep or wake,
In me were fixed, and in me must abide.

"When the enemy is near thee,
 Call on us!
 In our hands we will upbear thee,
 He shall neither scathe nor scare thee,
 He shall fly thee, and shall fear thee,
 Call on us!
 Call when all good friends have left thee,
 Of all good sights and sounds bereft thee;
 Call when hope and heart are sinking,
 And the brain is sick with thinking,
 Help, O help!
 Call, and following close behind thee
 There shall haste, and there shall find thee,
 Help, sure help!
 "When the panic comes upon thee,
 When necessity seems on thee,
 Hope and choice have all foregone thee,
 Fate and force are closing o'er thee,
 And but one way stands before thee—
 Call on us!
 O, and if thou dost not call,
 Be but faithful, that is all.
 Go right on, and close behind thee
 There shall follow still and find thee,
 Help, sure help!"

To the still small voice of conscience, "so heavenly toned," he turns a deaf ear, and having silenced these compunctious visitings with sophistical and specious arguments, he finally surrenders himself to the Tempter, with the exclamation:

"Welcome, O world, henceforth; and farewell dreams!"

Upon the details of the closing scene when, after a lapse of thirty years, we are reintroduced to Dipsycus, who, in the meantime, has risen to a post of dignity and honour, I will not dwell. Suffice it to say that retribution comes at last;—obliged by an attack of paralysis to resign his office, we part from him alone, ruminating upon the last words addressed to him by an unwelcome visitant:

"You called me pleasure once, I now am guilt."

In Clough the sentiment of Duty was paramount; faith in the Right, to which he yielded unswerving

allegiance, survived his religious beliefs ; it would almost seem, however, as if, in the fall of Dipsycus, he wished to enforce his conviction that, for the generality of mankind, an assured belief in the fundamental truths of religion can alone enable them to triumph over temptation, and to keep, often with painful effort, the narrow path of duty and self-denial.

In this respect, the moral of "Dipsycus" coincides with that of the first part of "Faust," to which, psychologically, it bears a striking resemblance ; the diversity of scene in which it is laid, however, sufficiently vindicates the originality of the more modern poem which, in addition to many interesting passages setting forth the inner life of Dipsycus, contains also several charming lyrics, admirably descriptive of Venetian life.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.—With Arthur Hugh Clough must be associated, as representing, through the medium of verse, a still sadder phase of the sceptical tendencies of the age, Matthew Arnold, who has given forcible expression to that spirit of dejection, of wistful sadness, almost of despair, which, in some minds, accompanies their abandonment of their cherished religious convictions. This is not the place to discuss, under their varied aspects, lyric, narrative, dramatic, and elegiac, the works of the gifted poet who has so recently passed from among us ; in each of the above departments of song, especially the last, he has enriched our literature with poems of rare beauty, many of which, "in verses metrically perfect and of a melody strange and bewitching," appeal to the deepest emotions of the human heart. Among his exquisite elegiac poems there is one which, in the present connection, is invested with peculiar interest, being a monody, to commemorate the Author's friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, who had shared with him the doubts and perplexities of this questioning and speculative age.

"Yes, thou art gone ! and round me too the night
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.

.

And long the way appears, which seemed so short
 To the less practised eye of sanguine youth;
 And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air,
 The mountain-tops where is the throne of Truth,
 Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare."

In the following lines Matthew Arnold renounces his belief in Christ's Resurrection, which he declares to be an illusion.

"Ay, ages long endured his span
 Of life.—'Tis true received—
 That gracious Child, that thorn-crowned Man!
 He lived while we believed.

"While we believed, on earth he went,
 And open stood his grave;
 Men called from chamber, church, and tent,
 And Christ was by to save.

"Now he is dead! Far hence he lies
 In the lorn Syrian town;
 And on his grave, with shining eyes,
 The Syrian stars look down."

To his intense regret at this collapse of Faith, which he laments as one of the saddest features of the age, he has also given poetical expression, in the following pathetic lines:

"The sea of faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled;
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating to the breath
 Of the night wind, down the vast edge's drear
 And naked shingles of the world."

In the striking poem entitled, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," we have another melancholy picture of the despondency occasioned by the wreck of religious belief, which, it is to be feared, represents only too faithfully the inner experience of many gifted minds. After describing the Carthusians' world-famed home,

"Where, ghostlike in the deepening night
Cowled forms brush by in gleaming white,"

he exclaims,

"All are before me! I behold
The House, the Brotherhood austere!
And what am I, that I am here?"

"For rigorous teachers seized my youth,
And purged its faith, and trimmed its fire,
Showed me the high, white star of truth,
There bade me gaze, and there aspire.
Even now their whispers pierce the gloom:
'What dost thou in this living tomb?'"

"Forgive me, masters of the mind!
At whose behest I long ago
So much unlearned, so much resigned—
I come not here to be your foe!
I seek these anchorites, not in ruth,
To curse and to deny your truth;

"Not as their friend, their child, I speak!
But as, on some far northern strand,
Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic Stone—
For both were faiths and both are gone.

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride—
I come to shed them at their side."

In the "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of Obermann," we have another striking picture of the deep pain which accompanies the loss of religious faith.

"A fever in these pages burns
Beneath the calm they feign;
A wounded human spirit turns
Here, on its bed of pain.

"Though here a mountain-murmur swells
Of many a dark-boughed pine;
Though, as you read, you hear the bells
Of the high-pasturing kine.

"Yet, through the hum of torrent lone,
And brooding mountain-bee,
There sobs I know not what ground-sob
Of human agony."

A more hopeful tone is heard in the concluding lines of the poem entitled, "Obermann Once More," wherein the Recluse of the Alps, after picturing the collapse of faith and of social order which succeeded the French Revolution, and which drove him to the wilderness, thus exhorts the younger poet :

"O thou, who, ere thy flying span
Was passed, of cheerful youth,
Didst find the solitary man
And love his cheerless truth—

"Despair not thou as I despaired,
Nor be cold gloom thy prison !
Forward the gracious hours have fared,
And see ! the sun is risen !

.
"The world's great order dawns in sheen
After long darkness rude,
Divinelier imaged, clearer seen,
With happier zeal pursued.

.
"Help it to fill that deep desire,
The want which crazed our brain,
Consumed our soul with thirst like fire,
Immedicable pain ;

"Which to the wilderness drove out
Our life, to Alpine snow,
And palsied all our word with doubt
And all our work with woe—

"What still of strength is left employ,
This end to help attain ;
One common wave of thought and joy
Lifting mankind again."

The anguish of heart thus described, as accompanying the collapse of religious faith, together with the intense regret expressed by Clough on feeling constrained to abandon his hereditary and traditional beliefs, bears

witness to the fact that faith in the great realities of the unseen world is essential to man's highest well-being.

Unspeakably dreary would be our earthly pilgrimage were there no supreme Being, the Infinite source of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True, the object of our profoundest reverence, our highest aspiration, and our deepest love; while man, "who looks before and after," "with thoughts that wander through eternity," if doomed to annihilation, must be regarded, not as a little lower than the angels, but only as a little higher than the brutes.

Hence the supreme importance of dissociating faith in these fundamental, I am inclined to say these indispensable religious truths, from faith in dogmas and doctrines which, being out of harmony with the spirit of the age, have lost their hold upon the more thoughtful minds of the present generation, and instead of ministering to the religious life, are a prolific source of perplexity and doubt.

This may be regarded as the important lesson enforced by the poems of Arthur Clough and Matthew Arnold, constituting a valuable contribution unconsciously made, by these two gifted poets, to the cause of human progress.

Deep interest, moreover, attaches to their productions as giving poetical expression, not only to their own religious doubts and perplexities, but also as reflecting, under one very important aspect, the intellectual tendencies of the age in which they lived.

They are also noteworthy as illustrating the truth embodied in Tennyson's familiar lines :

"There dwells more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

CONCLUSION.

ROBERT BROWNING. 1812—1889.

LORD TENNYSON. 1809.

POETRY being the expression from generation to generation of the highest experiences of the highest minds, it is deeply interesting to find that, in each succeeding age, and under every variety of form, it has, with few exceptions, given expression to those high instincts in the human soul,

“ Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing—
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence ; truths that wake
To perish never.”

To the works of our distinguished living poets, excepting those of Lord Tennyson, it is not my intention to refer ; he may truly be characterized as the patriarch of song ; entering upon his poetical career in 1830, he has continued for upwards of sixty years

“ To fling abroad
The winged shafts of truth ;”

to denounce, with prophetic fire, our national sins ; to pour forth, in impassioned strains, his enthusiasm for the Good, the Beautiful, and the True, and at the same time to delight his contemporaries with his stately music.

With him I shall associate Robert Browning, whose

recent loss has been so deeply deplored, not only by England, but by all English-speaking peoples. To attempt any exposition of the works of these two great poets would be foreign to my purpose.

I shall merely appeal to them as bearing emphatic witness to the divine and immortal nature of the human soul and to the relation subsisting between it and the Infinite Mind.

I shall appeal to them also as indicating the higher level, moral and spiritual, which has been reached by humanity on its onward march.

In an earlier chapter I called attention to the inadequate conception entertained by Plato respecting the Moral Law, which, being inherent in the Divine Nature, is changeless and eternal, while man's recognition and interpretation of it, depending upon the progressive development of his higher nature, must, of necessity, be a slow and gradual process.

It is therefore satisfactory to find the voice of song, in Wordsworth's celebrated Ode, giving expression to this higher conception of Duty, as universal and everlasting law, thus bearing witness to the progress of humanity in this most important sphere of human culture.

This recognition of Law, as God's manifestation of himself, alike in the physical and the moral world, is the special characteristic of Lord Tennyson, and underlies many of his poems. Thus, in his noble "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington," he glorifies allegiance to Duty as the divinely appointed means of bringing man into the immediate presence of God, thus enforcing the lesson taught by Wordsworth.

"Not once or twice in our fair island-story,
The path of duty was the way to glory;
He, that ever following her commands,
On with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward, and prevailed,
Shall find the toppling crags of Duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun."

We have, moreover, the highest authority for saying that "Love is the fulfilling of the Law;" Tennyson in his "Palace of Art," and other poems, bears witness to the truth embodied in these words, and inculcates the important lesson that the highest intellectual gifts, divorced from sympathy and helpfulness, cannot work efficiently, and that the richest treasures of Art, if possessed in selfish isolation, will eventually become a source of misery rather than of happiness to their possessors.

"And he that shuts love out, in turn shall be
Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie
Howling in outer darkness."

Very noble, also, as setting forth the true nature of Virtue, are the following lines, entitled "Wages:"

"Glory of warrior, glory of orator, glory of song,
Paid by a voice flying by to be lost in an endless sea—
Glory of Virtue, to fight, to struggle, to right the wrong—
Nay, but she aim'd not at glory, no lover of glory she:
Give her the glory of going on, and still to be.

"The wages of sin is death; if the wages of Virtue be dust,
Would she have heart to endure for the life of the worm and the
fly?

She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just,
To rest in a golden grove, or to bask in a summer sky:
Give her the wages of going on, and not to die."

In considering the progress of humanity, we must bear in mind another striking characteristic of the ancient Hellenes, to which history bears emphatic witness;—namely, the extremely narrow range of their altruistic sympathies; a limitation manifesting itself, down to the latest period of their national life, in the bitter hatred and antagonism which separated their several communities, and which led to the final subjugation of their country. The same spirit manifested itself, not only in the revolting system of slavery upon which their civilization was based, but also in the supreme contempt with which they regarded all who

could not claim affinity with their favoured race, and whom they stigmatized as barbarians.

In striking contrast to this feature of ancient civilization is the great christian principle of Human Brotherhood, the partial recognition of which, in spite of class distinctions and social prejudice, forms one of the most hopeful features of the nineteenth century.

It must, however, be confessed that the recognition of this principle has been a plant of exceedingly slow growth, while its practical realization, between nation and nation, when we look at the armed attitude of Europe, appears, even at the present time, like an utopian dream. All the more grateful should we feel to the poets who, in immortal song, have embodied their belief in the ultimate reign of righteousness and peace, the goal towards which humanity is making slow but steady progress.

Cowper was, I believe, the first English poet to realize in its full significance the principle of human brotherhood, based as it is upon the Fatherhood of God, and was, moreover, the first to anticipate the time when nations, as well as individuals, shall be united by the fraternal bond as members of the great human family.

Many grand utterances, embodying similar anticipations, might be quoted from subsequent poets, especially from Shelley and Victor Hugo; nowhere, however, has this larger conception of humanity, as one universal brotherhood, found nobler expression than in the following lines from Tennyson's "Locksley Hall."

Discerning with prophetic eye,

"The one far-off divine event,
Towards which the whole creation moves,"

the poet summons his fellow-workers to labour for its realization. Having himself an assured belief in "the Being of infinite goodness and wisdom," who is guiding humanity on its onward march, he inspires that conviction of ultimate success which is one of the most powerful incentives to exertion.

"Men, my brothers, men the workers, ever reaping something
 new;
 That which they have done but earnest of the things that they
 shall do;
 For I dipt into the future, far as human eye can see,
 Saw the vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

 Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were
 furl'd
 In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world."

The same grand hope finds expression in "The Golden Year:"

"Ah! when shall all men's good
 Be each man's rule, and universal Peace
 Lie like a shaft of light across the land,
 And like a lane of beams athwart the sea,
 Thro' all the circle of the golden year?"

With reference to the great spiritual realities of the unseen world, peculiar interest attaches to the utterances of Tennyson and Browning, as showing that, in this preeminently sceptical and scientific age, two of the greatest minds of the century cherish a profound belief in the existence of God, as a Being "who ever lives and loves," and in the personal immortality of the human soul. Additional interest attaches to the religious convictions of these two great poets, because, so far from ignoring the doubts and perplexities in connection with this all-important subject, so rife at the present time, they do not conceal the fact that they have themselves sounded their lowest depths, and are therefore qualified to be their exponents. Thus in his great poem, "In Memoriam," while narrating his own experience under a terrible bereavement, Tennyson, at the same time, gives poetical expression to the ghastly doubts and misgivings which cast their dark shadow over human life, intensifying its tragic element, in the inevitable death of those we love.

In the Introductory Stanza, he appeals to our deepest spiritual intuitions as the source of faith in the Supreme

Being, whom he characterizes as "Immortal Love," whom we can alone realize as "the Highest, Holiest manhood;" he thus proclaims the great truth that it is only through our own highest intuitions that we can attain to some faint conception of the Infinite Perfection as revealed in Christ.

His passionate belief in man's personal immortality finds expression in the following powerful lines.

After referring to Nature,

"So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life;"

he continues :

"So careful of the type? But no
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries: 'A thousand types are gone,
I care for nothing; all shall go.

"And he, shall he,
Man her last work, who seemed so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer;

"Who trusted God was love indeed,
And love creation's final law,
Tho' Nature, red in tooth and claw,
With Ravine, shriek'd against his creed.

"Who lov'd, who suffered countless ills,
Who battl'd for the True, the Just,—
Be blown about the desert dust,
Or seal'd within the iron Hills?

"No more? a monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons in the prime,
That tare each other in their shine,
Were mellow music matched with him."

He expresses, without hesitation, his conviction that, if there were no Beyond, life would not be worth living. He feels profoundly the difficulty which perplexes so many thoughtful minds, in the present day, of reconciling the terrible evils in Nature and in Humanity with the idea of Infinite Beneficence, as the presiding power

of the Universe. Nevertheless, he bows humbly and reverently before the inscrutable mystery, and clinging in spite of apparent contradiction to his faith in God, as revealed through the voice of reason and conscience, he believes that good is the ultimate goal of ill;

“And feels, altho’ no tongue can prove
That every cloud that spreads above
And veileth love, itself is love.”

In following this record of a poet’s soul, it is deeply interesting to find that, as, with the lapse of time, grief for the loss of his earthly friend becomes less and less poignant, the thought of his heavenly friend, blending with his inmost being, and with the secret springs of life, is transmuted into an ever-enduring source of strength and sacred joy. The beloved companion whom, in the first anguish of bereavement, he had pictured as torn from him by the dread “Shadow feared of Man,” is thus apostrophized in some of the concluding stanzas of the poem :

“Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine;

.

My love involves the love before;
My love is vaster passion now;
Tho’ mix’d with God and Nature thou,
I seem to love thee more and more.

“Far off thou art, but ever nigh;
I have thee still and I rejoice;
I prosper, circled with thy voice;
I shall not lose thee tho’ I die.”

In the beautiful poem entitled, “The Two Voices,” the poet, upon similar grounds, refuses to believe that the grave is humanity’s final goal. He appeals to the faith in his own immortality, to which, against the evidence of the senses, the mortal being so passionately clings. Referring to the recently dead, the voice exclaims :

"His palms are folded on his breast :
There is no other thing expressed
But long disquiet merged in rest."

To which the poet replies :

"Who forged that other influence,
That heat of inward evidence
By which he doubts against the sense?"

He appeals also to the high capacities and powers with which he is so magnificently endowed, and which, in this lower sphere, find no inadequate scope for their exercise, and also to his ideal of perfection, transcending experience, and bearing witness to his affinity with the Infinite Mind.

"That type of perfect in his mind
In nature can he nowhere find,
He sows himself on every wind.
"He seems to hear a Heavenly Friend,
And thro' thick veils to apprehend
A labour working to an end!"

Equally emphatic is the witness borne by Robert Browning to the fundamental truths of religion. In his view the visible universe is a manifestation of the Living God; the varied aspects of Nature, fraught with spiritual significance, being the media through which his soul reveals itself to our soul :

"Why, where 's the need of temple, when the walls
O' the world are that?"

By him man is viewed as a twofold being, allied to God by his spiritual nature, destined accordingly for endless progress, and haunted forever by visions of perfection transcending his experience. These, with passionate earnestness, he strives to realize, but finds to his disappointment that they elude his grasp;—nevertheless, with each effort to be true to his ideal, even though unsuccessful, he is brought into more intimate communion with the eternal source of all Goodness, Truth, and Beauty; hence, in spite of apparent failure,

his fitting attitude is that of aspiration, accompanied by earnest endeavour and unremitting toil; thus only can he win his way heavenward. This view of man's inevitable weakness and imperfection here, together with the grandeur of his destiny, finds expression in many of Mr. Browning's noblest poems, from which, as illustrating this line of thought the following passages, a list which might be greatly extended, may be selected:

"'Tis not what man does that exalts him,
But what man would do."

"I know this earth is not my sphere,
For I cannot so narrow me, but that
I shall exceed it."

"Progress, man's distinctive mark alone;
Not God's and not the beast's; God is, they are,
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."

"On the earth the broken arc, in the heaven the perfect round."

"Ah! a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?"

"In man's self arise
August anticipations, symbols, types
Of a dim splendour ever on before,
In that eternal circle run by life."

In "Evelyn Hope," and other poems, Browning gives expression to his belief in personal immortality, while in "Cleon" he has strikingly portrayed the profound discouragement felt by many of the greatest minds of antiquity at the prospect of annihilation, which became the more unendurable as, with the development of their intellectual powers, they realized more and more the soul's capacity for joy. Thus Cleon, the ancient Greek thinker,—poet, painter, and sculptor,—in writing to Porus, his friend and patron, gives expression to the sentiments awakened within him by the prospect of death.

"I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
 The man who loved his life so over-much,
 Shall sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
 I dare at times imagine to my need,
 Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
 Unlimited in capability
 For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
 To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us ;
But no !
 Zeus has not yet revealed it ; and alas
 He must have done so were it possible."

That Mr. Browning has in these latter words faithfully reproduced the sentiment of the highest minds of antiquity is shown by the fact that they are almost literally translated from "Marcus Aurelius," xii. 5.

Evil being inextricably interwoven with Good, in the tissue of human life, is never deprecated by Robert Browning. To his penetrating glance, "this dread machinery of sin and sorrow" is revealed as the necessary agent for developing

"The moral qualities of man ;—
 To make him love and be beloved,
 Creating and self-sacrificing too."

"Why comes temptation but for man to meet
 And master, and make crouch beneath his foot."

In the same spirit, intellectual difficulties must be met and grappled with.

"I prize the doubt,
 Low things exist without,
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark."

Accordingly, regarding the darker aspects of human life, its trials and its limitations, its disappointments and its pangs, as media appointed by supernal love for bringing man's froward will into harmony with the will of God, so far from rebelling against them, he gratefully welcomes them, being well aware that only through their agency can the lesson of life be truly learned.

"Then welcome each rebuff,
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,
 Each sting that bids not sit nor stand, but go!
 Be our joys three parts pain!
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
 Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe."

Nevertheless, he recognizes the permanence of Good, and the transitory nature of Evil, a belief in which he was anticipated by John Milton, who has given expression to his conviction in the following noble lines:

"But Evil on itself shall back recoil,
 And mix no more with goodness; if this fail,
 The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,
 And earth's base built on stubble."

The great truth proclaimed by Browning is, however, that which also finds expression in the opening stanza of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," namely, that the human soul is the true Shekinah; that while the material universe reveals the majesty, the omnipotence, the wisdom of God, it is only through the human attribute of pure, self-sacrificing love that we rise to the conception of the Infinite Love, to which alone we can offer the incense of genuine, heartfelt worship.

It is in "Saul," a truly magnificent poem, and, in my judgment, Browning's master-work, that this idea of man's finite love, as revealing God's infinite love, finds its most perfect embodiment.

David, having been summoned to minister to the Hebrew king in his dark hour, and having, through the ministry of song, partially succeeded, is seized with an intense longing to complete the work, and to restore the monarch to newness of life:

"And oh, all my heart, how I loved him!
 Could I help thee, my father, inventing a bliss,
 I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;
 I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,
 As this moment,—had love but the warrant love's heart to
 dispense!"

He then realizes the absolute perfection of God, as seen

"In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul, in the clod ;
And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too,)
The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
As, by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet."

He then proceeds as follows :

"Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here the parts
shift?

Here, the creature surpass the creator,—the end, what begun?
Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?"

So he rises to the conception of the infinitude of God's love.

"I believe it! 'Tis thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive;
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.

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See the King—I would help him, but cannot, the wishes fall
through,

Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow; grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would; knowing which
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!
Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou,—so wilt
thou!

.

'Tis the weakness of strength that I cry for! my flesh that I
seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever: a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ
stand!"

Thus Poetry, through her inspired votaries, bears
emphatic witness to the progress made by Humanity on
its onward march; moreover, while this is her encouraging
lesson with reference to the past, she has a lesson

also in regard to the future, namely, that whatever conceptions of the Good and the Beautiful, in harmony with the eternal truth of things, may be borne in upon the human soul, must always be transcended by the divine reality, and hence we have the soul-animating pledge of endless progress, as the destined portion alike of humanity and of the individual soul.

